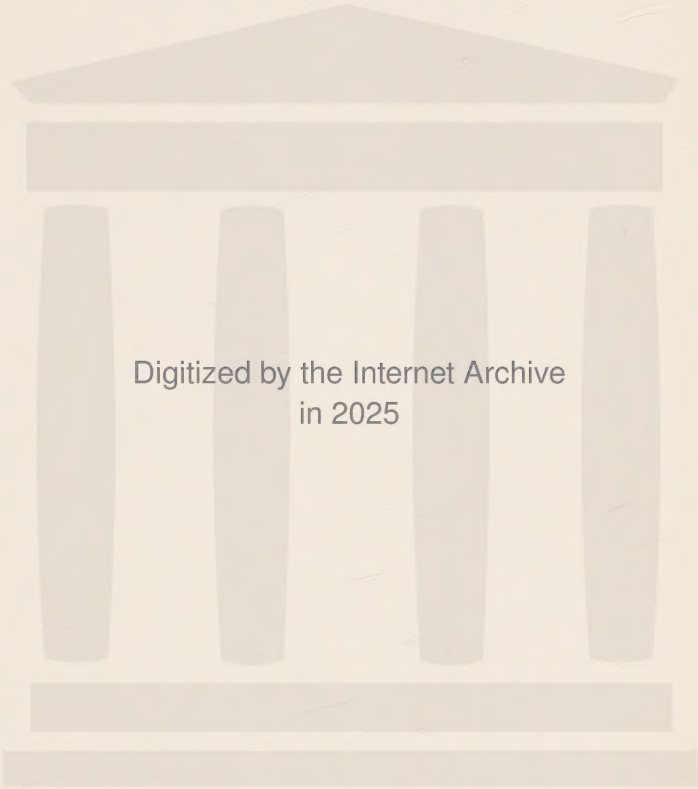
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THE GAMBLERS
AND
MARRIAGE

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BY
NIKOLAI V. GOGOL

Translated by
ALEXANDER BERKMAN

THE MACAULAY COMPANY
NEW YORK

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Nikolai Vasilievitch Gogol, the Molière of Russia, was born in the sunny Ukraina in March, 1809, and died in Moscow forty-three years later. The author of Russia's famous national comedy, "The Inspector-General," Gogol was the first dramatist of his country to write plays on the Western European model, even as his friend Pushkin was the first Russian poet to introduce the Western strain into the literature of his people.

"There never was a writer," said Pushkin to Gogol," who possessed in as high degree as you the gift of painting the pettiness and mediocrity of man, of bringing out the trivialities of life, and laying bare the meanness and sordidness of the average human soul, so that it stares one in the face and there is no escape from it."

Gogol was the natural predecessor of Dostoyevski. Both were the poets of a dismal age. Both were the children of that dark, oppressive, tortuous atmosphere which permeated Russia during the reign of Nicholas I. But Gogol's medium of expression was laughter, biting satire, whereas Dostoyevski's weapon was self-laceration and humble penitence.

In the comedy "Marriage," which Gogol began in 1832 as "The Wooers" and completed only in 1842

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in its final form, the author attacked in his inimitable manner the modern problem of escape from marriage. By unexcelled, mirth-provoking characterization, and with delightful irony, Gogol satirized the fear of marriage inherent in the soul of the average man. Gogol's solution is very simple, indeed: escape through a window.

"The Gamblers" is a masterpiece of dramatic suspense, and has been hailed in Europe as a model for plot development. With a few strokes, Gogol drew this set of characters whose purpose in life is so similar, yet whose manners are so individual. When "The Gamblers" was first produced in Berlin, it made a striking impression on the audience whose mystification was complete to the very end. "Marriage" has been frequently produced in various European capitals, and is one of the perennial plays on the Russian stage.

ISAAC DON LEVINE.

THE GAMBLERS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

IKHAREV, *a professional gambler.*

GAVRIUSHKA, *his valet.*

ALEXEI, *a servant at the inn.*

SHVOKHNEV, Piotr Petrovitch
UTESHITELNY, Stepan Ivanovitch
COLONEL KRUGEL
GLOV, Mikhail Alexandrovitch
ZAMUKHRISHKIN
} *A Gang of Gamblers*

GLOV, Alexander Mikhailovitch, *the assumed son of the elder Glov*

THE GAMBLERS

A room in a country inn

[IKHAREV *enters, accompanied by the house servant* ALEXEI *and by his own valet* GAVRIUSHKA.]

ALEXEI

Please, sir! Step in, sir. Fine room and quiet as can be. Our very quietest. Never any noise, sir.

IKHAREV

Well, I guess it's quiet all right, but plenty of cavalry, eh?

ALEXEI

You mean fleas, sir? Be easy on that, sir. If any flea or bug bite you, sir, we take all responsibility. Yes, sir—this is a first-class house, it is indeed, sir.

IKHAREV

[*To* GAVRIUSHKA.] Bring the things from the carriage. [GAVRIUSHKA *exit. To* ALEXEI.] What's your name?

ALEXEI

Alexei, sir. At your service.

IKHAREV

Now, listen. [*Significantly.*] Who all is here? Speak frankly.

ALEXEI

Well, sir, there are quite a lot. Almost every room taken.

IKHAREV

But who? Who are they? Name them!

ALEXEI

Well, sir, there's Shvokhnev,—that is, Piotr Petrovitch, then Colonel Krugel, Stepan Ivanovitch Uteshitelny.

IKHAREV

Do they play?

ALEXEI

For six nights now they've been at a big game, sir.

IKHAREV

[*Hands him some silver coins.*] Here, take this.

ALEXEI

[*Bowing.*] Thank you, sir.

IKHAREV

There is more where this is coming from.

ALEXEI

Glad to serve you, sir.

IKHAREV

With whom do they play? Just among themselves?

ALEXEI

No, sir. They've just cleaned out Captain Artunovsky. And from Prince Shenkin they won thirty thousand.

IKHAREV

Here's more for you. [*Handing him a bill.*] If you deal square with me, you'll get more. Tell the truth, now; you yourself bought the deck, eh?

ALEXEI

No, sir. They got them together. From that store next door, sir.

IKHAREV

Sure, now? You're not trying to fool me, what?

ALEXEI

'Pon my soul, sir!

IKHAREV

All right, all right. I'll see you again about it. [GAVRIUSHKA *brings in a chest and box. To* GAVRIUSHKA.] Put the chest down here, man. Now, go, and get ready to shave me. [*Both servants leave.* IKHAREV, *alone, opens the chest filled with packs of playing-cards. To himself.*] What a picture, eh? Each deck pure gold! And what hard work it was! My eyes are still sore from studying the damned designs. A labor of love, though! It's worth a fortune. What a rich inheritance for one's family! Here, this blessed darling (picking up a deck), a jewel, she is. Deserves the name I gave her —Adelaida Ivanovna. Serve me, sweetheart, as your good little sister has served me: win 80,000 for me, and I promise you, honest, when I return home I'll erect a marble statue to you—I will, on my honor! [*Hearing noise outside, he hastily closes the chest.* ALEXEI *and* GAVRIUSHKA *bring in hot water, towels and shaving things.*]

IKHAREV

Alexei, where are those gentlemen now? In their rooms?

ALEXEI

In the sitting room, sir.

IKHAREV

All right. I'll go and take a look at them. [*Exit.* ALEXEI *and* GAVRIUSHKA *remain alone.*]

ALEXEI

Guess you're from some far-off place?

GAVRIUSHKA

From Riasan.

ALEXEI

Your master's home?

GAVRIUSHKA

No. He himself belongs to Smolensk.

ALEXEI

Estate there, then?

GAVRIUSHKA

There, and in Kaluga also. In one a hundred, in the other eighty souls.

ALEXEI

So—is that so, estates in those two places?

GAVRIUSHKA

To be sure. Of servants alone we have . . . [*Interrupted by the entrance of* KRUGEL *and* SHVOKHNEV.]

KRUGEL

I hope he is not going to find us here. Might surprise us.

SHVOKHNEV

Have no fear. Stepan Ivanovitch will detain him there. [*To* ALEXEI.] There, you better go, they're looking for you in the office.

[*Exit* ALEXEI.]

SHVOKHNEV

[*Hastily approaching* GAVRIUSHKA.] Where does your master come from?

GAVRIUSHKA

Just now from Riasan.

SHVOKHNEV

Big estate?

GAVRIUSHKA

Yes, sir.

SHVOKHNEV

Plays?

GAVRIUSHKA

Yes, sir.

SHVOKHNEV

Here's a yellow-back for you. [*Giving him a bill.*] Now, tell us everything.

GAVRIUSHKA

But . . . you won't tell my master?

SHVOKHNEV AND KRUGEL

Don't be afraid! On our word!

SHVOKHNEV

He's won a lot recently, hasn't he?

GAVRIUSHKA

D'you know Colonel Tchebotarev?

SHVOKHNEV

Tchebotarev? No. Why?

GAVRIUSHKA

Well, about three weeks ago we won 80,000 from him, and a fine new carriage, and a carpet and epaulets, pure gold.

SHVOKHNEV

[*Significantly to* KRUGEL.] Eighty thousand, eh? [KRUGEL *makes a motion with his head.*] You think—crooked? All right, we'll find that out in a moment. [*To* GAVRIUSHKA.] Say, old man, just tell us this: when the boss is at home alone, you understand, what does he do?

GAVRIUSHKA

What does he do? What should he do? He's a gentleman, and he knows how to behave like one. He does nothing, of course.

SHVOKHNEV

No fibbing, now! I'll bet he never lets the deck out of his hands.

GAVRIUSHKA

I can't tell you, sir. I've been only two weeks now with the boss. Before me he had Pavlushka on the road with him. Then we have another valet, Gerasim, and Ivan, also a valet, and . . .

SHVOKHNEV

[*To* KRUGEL.] You think—a crook, eh?

KRUGEL

Most likely.

SHVOKHNEV

Still, we must take a chance. By gosh, we will!
[*Exeunt hastily.*]

GAVRIUSHKA

[*Alone.*] Clever scamps! But thanks for the bill. I guess I'll get my Matrena something for it, a pair of new stockings, may be. And for the kiddies, too. Ah, fine life, this, I love the road! A fellow has at least a chance—something on the side, and then—when the boss orders something bought, I can earn a dime on every dollar spent. To think how easy these gentlemen have it! Go where they please

—tired of one place, one, two, three—we're somewhere else! That's the life, all right, all right.

[*Enter* IKHAREV, *then* ALEXEI.]

IKHAREV

[*To himself.*] They don't look very dangerous to me, yet. . . . Who can tell? No, one can never be sure. . . . Ah, I'm just itching to clean 'em up! God, how happy it would make me! The very thought of it makes my heart beat violently. [*Takes soap, shaving brush and towel, and sits down in front of the mirror. Starts shaving himself.*] It makes me so nervous, I can't shave.

[*Enter* ALEXEI.]

ALEXEI

Do you wish to order a bite, sir?

IKHAREV

Yes, yes, certainly! Bring some lunch for four persons: some caviar, salmon, a few bottles of wine. And give him some food now [*indicating* GAVRIUSHKA].

ALEXEI

[*To* GAVRIUSHKA.] Please step into the kitchen —it's ready for you.

[*Exit* GAVRIUSHKA.]

IKHAREV

[*Continuing to shave.*] Say, now—how much did they give you?

ALEXEI

Who, sir?

IKHAREV

No monkey business, you hear! Speak!

ALEXEI

Well, er . . . they tipped me, for my service.

IKHAREV

How much? Fifty roubles?

ALEXEI

Yes, sir, fifty.

IKHAREV

Well, from me you get a hundred, old fellow. You see the bill on the table there? Take it. Don't be afraid, it won't bite you. And I shall demand nothing from you except that you just be square with me, understand? Let the cards come from anywhere, I don't care. But here is a dozen from me for you. [*Hands him a sealed package.*] You see the point?

ALEXEI

Yes, sir, sure. Depend on me—I know my business.

IKHAREV

Take care, hide them well—understand? [*Puts away the brush and soap, and dries his face with the towel. Exit* ALEXEI.] Ah, that would be fine, splendid! Hell, I'm just crazy to do 'em up.

[*Enter* SHVOKHNEV, KRUGEL *and* STEPAN IVANOVITCH UTESHITELNY, *all bowing.*]

IKHAREV

[*Bowing and approaching them.*] Pardon, gentlemen—my room is very unpretentious, as you see. Four chairs, and that's all.

UTESHITELNY

A warm "How d'ye do" is worth more than any hotel comforts.

SHVOKHNEV

It's the welcome that counts.

UTESHITELNY

Right you are. As for myself, I just can't do without jolly company. [*To* KRUGEL.] Remember, my dear fellow, the day I arrived here? All alone, didn't know a soul in the place. My landlady—as old as Methuselah. On the staircase—

the charwoman ugly as Satan, with a big ox of a servant-man hanging around—must have been hard up, sure—in short, I was bored to death. Then by lucky chance I met him, and soon after, him too [*pointing at his two friends*]. Gee, I was glad! I simply can't do without good company, I just can't. It's my nature—have to unbosom myself to every one.

KRUGEL

That's your weakness, old boy. It's no virtue. Too much is harmful. Guess you've been disappointed more than once.

UTESHITELNY

Well, yes, I have been fooled and deceived, and I always shall be, I suppose. Still, I can't help confiding in people.

KRUGEL

I can't understand this trait in you—to give every one your confidence. Friendship, well, that's another matter.

UTESHITELNY

You are right, but still—man belongs to society.

KRUGEL

Yes, but not wholly.

UTESHITELNY

No, wholly.

KRUGEL

No, not wholly.

UTESHITELNY

Yes, wholly.

KRUGEL

No not wholly.

UTESHITELNY

Yes, wholly!

SHVOKHNEV

[*To* UTESHITELNY.] Don't wrangle, man. You're wrong.

UTESHITELNY

[*Heatedly.*] No, I can prove it to you! It's an obligation! It's, it's . . . it's a duty! Yes, a duty! It's, it's . . .

SHVOKHNEV

On his hobby again! Temperamental, to beat the devil. You get him started once, well, you might get some sense out of his first few words, and then he just raves.

UTESHITELNY

I can't! I can't! I can't help it! If you talk of obligation and duty, I can't keep quiet. I'll speak right out, whether you like it or not! It's a sacred

thing with me, and I won't have it treated lightly. Indeed, I won't.

IKHAREV

[*To himself.*] Well, old fellow, I distrust the kind that gets so excited when "duty" is mentioned. I know the brand! [*Aloud.*] I say, gentlemen, not interrupting the discussion of sacred obligations, but shan't we have a little game?

[*During the following talk the servants prepare luncheon at the side table.*]

UTESHITELNY

Well, no objection—provided the stakes are low.

KRUGEL

A little innocent pastime, all right.

IKHAREV

Guess we can get cards at the hotel?

SHVOKHNEV

Sure. Just order it.

IKHAREV

Cards! [ALEXEI *busies himself at the card table.*] Meanwhile, gentlemen, please! [*Points to the luncheon.*] Don't know if the salmon is A1, but the caviar [*trying it*]—passable.

SHVOKHNEV

[*With a big mouthful.*] No, the salmon is fine.

KRUGEL

[*Similarly.*] Th' cheese's good.

SHVOKHNEV

[*To* KRUGEL.] Remember the cheese we had a few weeks ago?

KRUGEL

Wonderful! The best I ever tasted.

UTESHITELNY

But you know, gentlemen, when cheese is good? Only when you have piled one dinner on top of another—there's the real mission of cheese. I assure you! It's like a good quartermaster inviting you, "Welcome, gentlemen, there's still room!"

IKHAREV

Welcome, gentlemen, the cards are on the table.

UTESHITELNY

[*Approaching the card table.*] Reminds me of old times. See, Shvokhnev, cards, eh? How many years since . . .

IKHAREV

[*To himself.*] Trying to kid me, eh?

UTESHITELNY

[*To* IKHAREV.] What say you, my friend?

IKHAREV

Just a little game. Say five hundred. Will you take off?

[*They begin playing. Various exclamations.*]

SHVOKHNEV

Queen, ace—ten on each.

UTESHITELNY

Hand me your deck, please. I'll take a card on the luck of your lady.

KRUGEL

Permit me to add a nine.

UTESHITELNY

Shvokhnev, give me the chalk. I add and take off.

SHVOKHNEV

Gee, what's now!

UTESHITELNY

A fiver!

KRUGEL

Here! Allow me—there should be another deuce in the deck.

UTESHITELNY

[*Jumping from his seat. To himself.*] Damn it, there's something wrong here. They're not our cards.

[*The play continues.*]

IKHAREV

[*To* KRUGEL.] Permit me to ask: they go, both of them?

KRUGEL

Both.

IKHAREV

Not raising?

KRUGEL

No.

IKHAREV

[*To* SHVOKHNEV.] And you?

SHVOKHNEV

For the next deck. [*Gets up, hastily approaches* UTESHITELNY *and speaks quickly to him.*] Damn it, he's crooked as hell. And clever. A professional all right, all right.

UTESHITELNY

[*Excited.*] What—to let the 80,000 slip us!

SHVOKHNEV

Have to. No chance.

UTESHITELNY

Well, that's to be seen yet. But first we must have an explanation with him.

SHVOKHNEV

What d'you mean?

UTESHITELNY

To make a clean breast of it.

SHVOKHNEV

How? What for?

UTESHITELNY

Tell you later. Come.

[*Both approach* IKHAREV *and tap him on each shoulder.*]

UTESHITELNY

What's the use wasting your ammunition, eh?

IKHAREV

[*Politely.*] I beg your pardon—how do you mean it?

UTESHITELNY

Oh, let's drop all ceremony. We've seen your work,—we appreciate your abilities. And there-

fore, in the name of my friends, I propose to you a partnership. By pooling our knowledge and capital, we'll do better than singly.

IKHAREV

[*Cautiously.*] In what sense do you mean it?

UTESHITELNY

Very simply. Let's speak frankly. I confess, we have agreed to clean you up, because we took you for just a sucker. But we realize now you are not an ordinary man. You have delved into the higher mysteries. So, do you want to be friends?

IKHAREV

With pleasure, gentlemen.

UTESHITELNY

Well, then, friends, shake all around. [*All shake* IKHAREV's *hand.*] From now on everything in common. No more pretense! All for one and one for all! Now, tell us, Ikharev, are you long in the business!

IKHAREV

Well, to tell the truth, I started pretty young. Had a hankering for it in my youth even. I remember at school, while the professor was holding forth, I used to play cards with my school-mates under the desk.

UTESHITELNY

That's what I thought. Such fine art cannot be acquired without practice from very early years. You remember, Shvokhnev, that young prodigy?

IKHAREV

What prodigy?

UTESHITELNY

Tell him the story, Shvokhnev.

SHVOKHNEV

He was a prodigy, and no mistake. Says to me one day his uncle [*indicating* UTESHITELNY]—Andrei Ivanovitch Piatkin, it was—"Shvokhnev," he says, "you want to see a miracle? A boy, just a kid of eleven, the son of Kubishev,—a wizard at juggling cards. Beats every professional. Want to see him? Go down to Kubishev's." Well I come to Kubishev, send in my card and request to speak to Mr. Kubishev personally. Comes out a gentleman of respectable years. "You'll pardon me," I say to him, after introducing myself, "I have heard that God has blessed you with a most unusual son." "Yes, that's true," he replies simply, and I liked him for that—just so, without any pretense or ostentation about him—"yes," he says, "though it is not for the father to laud his own child, but he is really in a certain sense a wonder. Misha," he called, "come

here, show the guest your art." Well, I tell you, the boy *was* a wonder. Almost a child, not as high as my shoulder, and nothing particular in his eyes. He took a deck and began to shuffle and juggle the cards—well, I tell you, gentlemen, I was just flabbergasted. It was simply staggering.

IKHAREV

And you could notice nothing?

SHVOKHNEV

Not a thing. As clean as a whistle.

IKHAREV

Incredible!

UTESHITELNY

Marvelous, marvelous!

IKHAREV

And when you consider that it requires knowledge based on sharp observation, careful study of design . . .

UTESHITELNY

That is made easier now. Special marks and designs are now out of style. It's the key that's the main thing.

IKHAREV

You mean the key to the general design?

UTESHITELNY

Yes, the key of the design on the reverse side. I know a certain man—I don't care to name him, he's a very respectable person—who has devoted himself entirely to this study. Every year he receives from the capital several hundred decks—from whom, that's a secret. His business is to decipher the design and send on the key. Gets five thousand a year, just for that!

IKHAREV

It's a most important work.

UTESHITELNY

Well, that is really the right way. In political economy they call it—division of labor. Just the same as a carriage builder, for instance. He does not make the whole carriage, of course. The blacksmith and the carpenter and so on all work with him. Otherwise human life could not function properly.

IKHAREV

Permit me to ask a question, gentlemen. What tactics do you employ to make sure of the decks? One can't always bribe the servants, you know.

UTESHITELNY

God forbid! Too dangerous, at that. Might easily fall into a trap. We do it differently. Some-

times—well, our agent arrives at a fair. Stops at a respectable hotel for business men, near the fairgrounds. Lives at the hotel, spends money freely, and so on. One fine day he disappears, leaving his hotel bill unpaid. The hotel keeper examines the trunk the guest has left behind—finds a hundred dozen decks in it. The cards are of course immediately sold at public auction—a bit cheaper than at the usual price—the fair storekeepers fall over each other to secure the bargain—and in a few days the whole blessed town has been skinned at card games.

IKHAREV

Very clever!

SHVOKHNEV

Well, or the trick we played on that big real estate fellow.

IKHAREV

What was that?

UTESHITELNY

Well, 'twasn't bad, either. Do you know that big real estate man, Arkadiy Andreyevitch Dergunov? Well, probably you don't. Very rich, plays beautifully, of sterling honesty, straight as they make them. But no chance to get at him—he attends to everything himself, the servants are well trained, butlers, you know, staid old fellows—his home a castle, great estate, Egyptian gardens—in short,

everything on the English style: a real Russian country gentleman. Well, for three days we were his guests, but not the least opportunity to do anything. How go about it? Nothing doing—no way at all. At last a happy idea! One fine day a cab dashes by, right past the very gates. Three young fellows in it, drunk as can be, shouting, singing and yelling like wild Indians, and the horses running like mad. Of course, all the servants rush out—an interesting sight, you know—and suddenly they see something fall out of the cab. They run up to it —it's a valise. They call after the cab, wave their hands—it's useless, it's gone, leaving columns of thick dust behind it. Well, they open the valise—find some linen in it, clothing, two hundred in cash and some forty dozen decks. Well, naturally, the servants didn't refuse the money, and the cards went on the card tables—by next evening the host and his guests were left without a penny in their pockets, and we bade them Adieu!

IKHAREV

That's what I call clever! People say it is fraud and deception, but in reality it is brain work, development, finesse!

UTESHITELNY

Those people don't understand the spirit of play. Play is impartial; it is no respecter of persons. Let

my own father sit down at a game with me—I'd skin him the same as any stranger. Who tells him to play? At the card table all are equal.

IKHAREV

That's it! People don't understand that the gambler may be the most virtuous of men. I know a man who habitually cheats at cards, but he will give his last penny to a beggar. And at the same time he will never miss a chance to get into a game where a sucker is to be trimmed. Well, gentlemen, frankness for frankness—I am going to show you a little miracle. D'you know what a picked deck is, every card of which I can tell at a considerable distance?

UTESHITELNY

I know such cards, but may be of a different kind than yours.

IKHAREV

Without bragging, gentlemen, I can tell you there is no other like mine. It took me six months of the hardest work. Couldn't stand any sunlight for weeks afterward. My physician feared permanent inflammation of the eyes. [*Takes a deck out of the chest.*] Here you are! No wonder, gentlemen, that I have christened her with a name, just like a human being.

UTESHITELNY

What, really? A name?

IKHAREV

Yes, a name: Adelaida Ivanovna.

UTESHITELNY

[*Smilingly.*] You hear, Shvokhnev! Why, that's certainly an original idea—to name a deck of cards Adelaida Ivanovna. I think it splended!

SHVOKHNEV

Beautiful—Adelaida Ivanovna. It's grand!

UTESHITELNY

Adelaida Ivanovna! A Dutchy.' Look here, Krugel—there's a wife for you!

KRUGEL

I'm no Dutchman! My grandfather was Dutch, and even he couldn't speak the language.

UTESHITELNY

[*Carefully examining the deck.*] Well, this is a treasure. Not the least mark, not a sign of anything. But can you really tell each card at any distance?

IKHAREV

Permit me, gentlemen! I'll stand five paces from you, and from here I'll guess every card. Bet you two thousand if I miss one.

UTESHITELNY

Well, what card is this?

IKHAREV

Seven.

UTESHITELNY

Right you are! And this?

IKHAREV

Jack.

UTESHITELNY

I'll be damned, yes! Well, and this?

IKHAREV

The queen.

UTESHITELNY

Incredible!

KRUGEL

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Incredible!

SHVOKHNEV

Incredible!

UTESHITELNY

Permit me another look. [*Examining the deck.*] Wonderful! It deserves a name, I'm sure. But I must say that it would not be easy to put it to any use—perhaps with an inexperienced player only—because you would have to get the thing into action yourself.

IKHAREV

But that's done only at the very height of the play—at a moment when even the most experienced player gets nervous. And the moment a fellow gets excited—you can do anything you want with him. You know that even the best players—well, after a straight run of two days and nights, without sleep—they get stale, so to speak—just at that point I get my deck into action—every time, without fail! Believe me, the main thing is to keep cool while the other fellow is fuming—and there are a thousand ways of distracting his attention. Pick a quarrel with the bank or with one of the pointers—he's marking wrong—all eyes will be turned upon him—and meantime the trick is turned.

UTESHITELNY

Well, I see that besides your skill you also possess a cool head—that's a great asset. Your friendship is indeed of the greatest value to us. Let's have a drink, fellows!

IKHAREV

High time, gentlemen!

UTESHITELNY

Hey, man, [*to the valet*] bring some champagne! We'll drink to our close friendship, gentlemen!

IKHAREV

Right you are! It's worth the champagne.

SHVOKHNEV

Well, friends, we've come together for action, all the weapons are in our hands, we're ready for the great battle, only one thing is lacking . . .

IKHAREV

That's it,—where is the fortress we are to take —that's the trouble!

UTESHITELNY

Well, that can't be helped. The enemy isn't in sight just yet. [*Looking steadily at* SHVOKHNEV.] What? You look as if you meant to say that there *is* an enemy.

SHVOKHNEV

There is, yes . . . [*hesitates.*]

UTESHITELNY

Oh, I know whom you mean.

IKHAREV

[*With animation.*] Whom? Whom? Who is it?

UTESHITELNY

Nonsense, it's nothing. He imagines things. You see, there is a visitor here just now, a rich old fellow, Mikhail Alexandrovitch Glov is his name. But what's the use—he doesn't play, never takes a card into his hand. We've already tried all we could. . . . I've been at him for weeks; got friendly with him, even gained his confidence, but nothing doing, it's no good.

IKHAREV

But, listen: is there no chance to meet him? May be, there's no telling . . . you can never tell . . .

UTESHITELNY

Well, I tell you beforehand, it's wasted effort.

IKHAREV

But there is no harm in trying. Let's try it once more.

SHVOKHNEV

Well, you might at least call him in! If we don't succeed, there's nothing lost, we can just have a talk with him. Why not attempt it?

UTESHITELNY

If you insist—I don't care—I'll go fetch him.

IKHAREV

Bring him right now, do, please!

UTESHITELNY

All right, all right.

[*Exit.*]

IKHAREV

Really, now, you can't tell. Sometimes a thing seems quite impossible . . .

SHVOKHNEV

Yes, you may be right. After all, a man's a man, for all that. He may refuse once, twice, again and again, and then—press him a little more—and he'll say "Yes." There are fellows who look and act as if you could not approach them, but just go hard enough after them, as often as not you'll get 'em.

KRUGEL

But this one don't seem to be that kind.

IKHAREV

Eh, if we could only! . . . I am just itching for action. I must tell you that it is already a whole month since my last big game—won eighty thousand from Colonel Tchebotarev. I haven't had any

practice at all since then. You can easily imagine how I suffer from inactivity. I am just bored to death.

SHVOKHNEV

I understand you perfectly. It is just like some great general—I know how he feels when there is no fighting to be done. That's just a fatal intermission. I know from my own experience—it's no holiday.

IKHAREV

Would you believe me, I often feel such entre-acts so dull, I'm ready to sit down with the first comer, even at a five-rouble stake.

SHVOKHNEV

Naturally. That's the way even the best player often gets done up. Feels bored, there's no work,—well, he's eager for a game—like as not he'll fall in with a fellow without a penny in his pocket—and lose everything he has!

IKHAREV

But this man Glov, is he rich?

KRUGEL

Oh, he has plenty of money. He is worth a lot.

IKHAREV

Hell—what's to be done? Can't we get him a bit jolly—order some champagne——

SHVOKHNEV

Never touches a drop.

IKHAREV

What then can we do about it? How get him into a game? You know . . . after all, I think that cards are very seductive. I believe if he would only sit down and watch us play, he couldn't hold out long.

SHVOKHNEV

Well, we'll try. We here, with Krugel, will start a little game, here—near the wall—a very little game. But we must not pay too much attention to him: these old guys are very suspicious. [*They sit down to a game.*]

[*Enter* UTESHITELNY *and* GLOV, *a man past middle age, respectable looking.*]

UTESHITELNY

Here, Ikharev, permit me—Mikhail Alexandrovitch Glov!

IKHAREV

All my pleasure—I have been looking for the opportunity to have the honor. Living in the same hotel . . .

GLOV

I am also pleased to meet you. I regret only that it is just before my departure . . .

IKHAREV

[*Sets a chair before him.*] Please! . . . Have you been long in this town?

[Uteshitelny, Shvokhnev *and* Krugel *whisper together.*]

GLOV

Well, my dear sir, I am just sick of this place. I'll be glad to get out, to get home.

IKHAREV

Business, I suppose, detaining you?

GLOV

Yes, business, lots to do.

IKHAREV

A court case probably?

GLOV

No, thank goodness, no court business. Other troubles. You see, my daughter is getting married, a young lady of eighteen. Well, you can understand my position—I came here—have to do considerable shopping, but the main thing is, I'm buying here an estate for my daughter. The banks are slow about the money, I'm just wasting time here.

IKHAREV

A big estate?

GLOV

About two hundred thousand. I was to get the money from the bank several days ago already, but you know these legal matters,—some delay always happens when you least expect it. And I am sick of this waiting—at home they are all looking for me—I had thought I'd be back long ago. My daughter—a bride; the old lady cannot manage things there all by herself, you know. . . . Well, I have decided to drop it all and go home.

IKHAREV

How? You are not going to wait for the money?

GLOV

I can't help it. Just put yourself in my position, man. A whole month since I've been away from my family—the wife and children all waiting—no letters from them—every minute they expect me. I am anxious—who knows what's happening there. . . . I am going to leave the whole thing in charge of my son—he'll remain here. I am tired of the whole bother. [*Turning to* SHVOKHNEV *and* KRUGEL.] Well, gentlemen! I am afraid I have interrupted you—seems you've been doing something?

KRUGEL

No, that's nothing! That's just to kill the time.

GLOV

Seems to me it looks like a real game.

SHVOKHNEV

Just a few pennies as stakes.

GLOV

Ah, young men, take an old man's advice. Of course, youth—I understand. And there's no great harm—more as a pastime, at low stakes. That's all right, I can understand it well enough—I used to play myself, I speak from personal experience. But I know where it all leads to. Be careful, be warned, young men. It always begins with "just a little game," but where does it end, does it stop there?

SHVOKHNEV

[*To* IKHAREV.] There, he's got started, the old fool. [*To* GLOV.] Well, you are making a mountain of a molehill—that's the way of the old.

GLOV

Well, I am not as old as all that. I am just giving you the benefit of my experience.

SHVOKHNEV

I don't mean you personally, of course. But generally speaking, that's how old folks are. For instance, if they got the worst of it in some deal, they

are perfectly sure every one else will also get it in the neck. They walk on the street and slip on a banana peel, and they swear that the next fellow will also fall. They don't consider that may be the conditions are different, or that the other fellow may be more careful. No, they don't want to consider that! A man happened to be bitten by a dog, and they immediately shout that all dogs bite and no one should keep one.

GLOV

Well, perhaps you are right, partly. Old people may be too cautious, overcautious sometimes. But youth—it's just bursting with spirit, and the first thing you know, they break their necks!

SHVOKHNEV

That's it! The trouble is, it's one extreme or another. The young are too full of fire, too hot-headed—getting on everybody's nerves. And the old are too rusty, and they like to play the wise-acres and make everyone tired with their sermonizing.

GLOV

You speak very slightingly of the old.

SHVOKHNEV

What, slightingly! Just the plain truth, that's all!

IKHAREV

Permit me, gentlemen. [*To* SHVOKHNEV.] You are too rough in your . . .

UTESHITELNY

Well, as concerns cards, I agree entirely with Shvokhnev. I myself used to play—played hard, too; but thank goodness, I've quit it for good and all. Not because I lost much or turned into an old fogy. No, believe me, that's not it. Losing isn't the most important consideration. Peace of mind—that's the main thing. The excitement during the play, the nervous strain—say what you will, it surely shortens our lives.

GLOV

Right you are, indeed! I am glad to hear you say it. Permit me to ask—I know you quite a while, but I've no idea . . .

UTESHITELNY

What?

GLOV

Somewhat personal . . . may I ask, how old are you?

UTESHITELNY

Thirty-nine.

GLOV

Just think of it! What's thirty-nine—quite a young man yet! Wish we had more men like you—

good common sense is so rare nowadays. Ah, what a world it would be if people were a bit more steady, sensible. I am awfully glad to have made your acquaintance.

IKHAREV

I am entirely of your opinion, believe me. I'd never allow young fellows to touch a card. But for grown, mature men—a little distraction, a bit of fun—there's no harm in that. For you, for instance, for one of respectable age who doesn't care for dancing and such things, why not?

GLOV

That's true, but what for? There is enough of other pleasures and pastimes. And then—there are responsibilities, duties, sacred duties, gentlemen. Take the advice of an old man, my friends! The true mission of man is his home, in the circle of his family, in its bosom, so to speak. All those other things, you know—all this excitement and running after certain pleasures—vanity, vanity, that's all. It is not the real thing. The true joy of living—why, you bachelors have no idea of it! Take me, for instance. Why, I can hardly wait till I get home. I can see them now—daughter will throw herself on my neck—"Papa, darling, dear Papa!" —the son has come for his vacation from college

. . . haven't seen him in six months. . . . I tell you, words can't describe the feeling. . . . It's true. And after that—why, I wouldn't look at a card.

IKHAREV

Parental feeling, of course . . . but that's another matter. It has nothing to do with a little fun at cards . . .

ALEXEI

[*Entering, to* GLOV.] The carriage is ready. Shall I fetch your things, sir?

GLOV

I'm coming. Pardon me, gentlemen, just a moment.

[*Exit.*]

IKHAREV

No chance at all! It's useless!

UTESHITELNY

I said so before. You fellows ought to be able to size him up right—enough to look at him to know that he can't be induced to play.

IKHAREV

Still—if we'd press him a bit harder, who knows? Why, man, you yourself have sided with him!

UTESHITELNY

That's the way to act with these fellows. You must use some finesse with them, else he'll begin to be suspicious, see?

IKHAREV

Yes, but what's the good of it? What have you accomplished by it? He is going to leave and we stick here.

UTESHITELNY

Well, wait a while. It's not ended yet.

[*Enter* GLOV.]

GLOV

Well, gentlemen, I want to thank you for the pleasure of your acquaintance. Too bad it was at the eleventh hour, so to speak, for I must leave now. But, who knows, fate may bring us together again.

SHVOKHNEV

We hope so. The world isn't such a big place, after all.

GLOV

True, very true. It is all in the hands of Providence. Well, good bye, gentlemen. Thanks, once more. And you, [*to* UTESHITELNY] Stepan Ivanovitch, I am much obliged to you, you've been a good friend.

UTESHITELNY

Don't mention it. I took a great liking to you from the very beginning.

GLOV

Yes, you've been a good friend—so good, in fact, that—I make bold to ask another favor of you—may I?

UTESHITELNY

Why, certainly. I promise you beforehand.

GLOV

You'll take a great burden off my shoulders.

UTESHITELNY

How? What is it?

GLOV

You see, I am leaving my boy here, to look after matters. I say a splendid young man, Sasha is, but after all, very young and inexperienced—only twenty-two—a child almost. He has finished college —just out of school—I want him to join me in my business, but he won't listen to it. Thinks of nothing but entering the army, wants to become an officer of the royal guard. I have been doing my best to dissuade him. Why, I say to him, you are young, look around first, may be some other career is more suitable for you—you don't know what army life is

like. But, gentlemen, youth—youth, he's wild to be in the guard—shining uniform, you know, golden epaulets, high life—it's just drawing him like some wild horses. . . . Will you do me the favor, Utesh? He remains alone here—I left him something to attend to. He's young—anything may happen. . . . He shouldn't be cheated somehow in the deal there—or something might happen when he gets the money from the bank—I am a bit anxious. . . . Keep an eye on him, will you, dear friend? I have confidence in you. I know you will keep him out of harm. Do me this favor!

UTESHITELNY

Certainly, certainly, I'll do all that a father can for his son.

GLOV

Dear, dear friend! [*Embraces him.*] God has given you a kind heart—may he repay you for being so good to me. Well, good bye, gentlemen! Good bye!

IKHAREV

Good bye and farewell!

SHVOKHNEV

I hope you'll find everyone well at home.

GLOV

Thank you, gentlemen. Good bye!

UTESHITELNY

I will see you to your carriage and shake your hand again.

GLOV

You are very kind, my good friend.

[GLOV *and* UTESHITELNY *leave.*]

IKHAREV

The bird has flown away!

SHVOKHNEV

Yes, it's too bad—he's rich.

IKHAREV

I tell you, when he said "two hundred thousand," I thought my heart would jump right out.

KRUGEL

Such a fortune—it's no joke! Beautiful even to think of it!

IKHAREV

To think how much money is going to waste. What use is there in just keeping it—what good if it stays in the old fellow's pocket? Or it will just be spent on buying some old rags—for the bride, or something.

SHVOKHNEV

Yes, for old rags—it's just rotten, that's all!

IKHAREV

It is terrible to think how much of such money stays out of circulation. Just being lost, nothing short of it! Dead capital—so much dead capital lying around like corpses in the morgue. It is a pity, that's all. I wish—well, I'd be satisfied if I had as much as there is lying about in the Orphan Fund.

SHVOKHNEV

Well, I would be content with half of it.

KRUGEL

I would take a quarter.

SHVOKHNEV

Dutchy, you're a fibber! You'll want more.

KRUGEL

On my honor . . .

SHVOKHNEV

You'll cheat us.

[*Enter* UTESHITELNY *hurriedly and with bright face.*]

UTESHITELNY

It's all right, gentlemen, it is all right! He's gone, and the devil take him! So much the better, perhaps. His son is remaining. His nibs has turned over to the boy all the papers, the authoriza-

tion to receive the money and everything, and I am to look after the young fellow. The boy is all right, all right! He's just crazy to get into the guard—nothing but the crack regiment will do, the hussars! There will be something doing yet, friends. I'll go and get him here.

[*Rushes off.*]

IKHAREV

That's the boy! He is wonderful, our Utesh!

SHVOKHNEV

Well, it looks as if things are picking up a bit.

[*Business of happy expectation.*]

IKHAREV

Utesh is a corker! Now I understand why he acted so with the old fellow and agreed with him in everything. Very clever, indeed!

SHVOKHNEV

Oh, that is his special forte.

KRUGEL

A very brilliant man, Utesh is.

IKHAREV

You know, when the old fogy mentioned that he is going to leave his son here some idea did strike me

—just flitted through my mind, you know. But he, our Utesh, he acted immediately upon it. Deucedly clever!

SHVOKHNEV

Wait, you don't know him yet.

[*Enter* UTESHITELNY *and* ALEXANDER MIKHAILOVITCH GLOV, *a youngish man.*]

UTESHITELNY

Gentlemen, permit me to introduce to you—Alexander Mikhailovitch Glov, a splendid young man! Love him as myself.

SHVOKHNEV

Glad to meet you [*shakes his hand*].

IKHAREV

Your acquaintance . . .

KRUGEL

What's the use wasting words—let's embrace!

GLOV

Gentlemen, I . . .

UTESHITELNY

Oh, drop all ceremony, "cheese it"! Equality——that's the thing! Glov—here we are all comrades, good fellows. No more ceremony!

SHVOKHNEV

That's it!

GLOV

Here she goes!

[*Shakes hands all around.*]

UTESHITELNY

That's the way. Bravo! Hey, there, champagne! Do you notice, gentlemen, that the young man already has a military air about him! Just cut out for the hussars, I say. No, my boy, you will pardon me, but I must say that your governor is a big hog. Think of it, insists on this devil-may-care fellow going into the civil service—to sit all day slinging some dirty ink—the idea! Well, old boy, tell me, your sister is about to be married, eh?

GLOV

The devil take her with her marriage! It's on her account that the governor kept me three weeks in this stupid hole!

UTESHITELNY

But listen—is your sister a good-looker, what?

GLOV

Well, not so bad. If she weren't my sister, I'd go after her myself . . .

UTESHITELNY

Bravo, bravo, Hussar! You can see at once that he's just born to it. But, look here, young friend, would you help me get her, if I wanted to? Kidnap her?

GLOV

Why not? I would, indeed!

UTESHITELNY

Bravo, Hussar! That's what it means to have the right spunk. Damme to hell, cut out for a Hussar, all right, all right! Hey, there, champagne! That's the kind of a man for me! I just love such dare-devils. Come, let me embrace you, you splendid fellow!

SHVOKHNEV

Me too! [*Embraces* GLOV.]

IKHAREV

I, too, friends! [*Embraces him.*]

KRUGEL

I also belong to the company. [*Embraces him.*]

[*The serving man* ANDREY *brings in a bottle of champagne, holding his thumb on the cork, which presently strikes into the ceiling. Fills the glasses.*]

UTESHITELNY

Gentlemen! To the health of the future lieutenant of the crack Hussar regiment! May he be the first sword, the most dashing devil, the champion drinker . . . in a word, may he be what he will!

ALL

May he be what he will! [*They drink.*]

GLOV

I drink to the Hussars! [*Raises his glass.*]

ALL

The Hussars! [*They drink.*]

UTESHITELNY

Gentlemen, we must lose no time in initiating our young friend into all the customs of Hussardom. He can drink, all right, that's evident. But that is nothing—it is necessary he should play like a gambler. D'you play?

GLOV

I'd just love to, but I haven't a penny.

UTESHITELNY

Oh, nonsense! Money—you need no money. Just enough to start the game,—then you'll win, sure enough!

GLOV

But I have none to begin with.

UTESHITELNY

We'll trust you. You have the authorisation to get the money from the bank, haven't you? Well, that is enough. We'll wait till you get it and then you will pay back what we advance to you. Till then you could give us a check—that is very simple. But what am I talking about—as if you are going to lose. There is no telling, you might win a few thousand right at the start.

GLOV

But if I lose?

UTESHITELNY

Shame on you! What kind of a Hussar are you, to talk like that! Of course, you either win or lose. What of it? That is just the beauty of it—the risk, man, the excitement of the uncertainty. You don't want a sure-thing game, do you? Any fool can play that way.

GLOV

[*With a wave of his arm.*] T'hell with it—sure thing I am game. What do I care about the governor—I'll play!

UTESHITELNY

Bravo, Lieutenant! Hey, there, cards! [*Pours out a glass for* GLOV.] The main thing is courage, daring, that's what! Strength, power, that's the word. Here goes, gentlemen, [*at the card table*] bank—twenty-five thousand. [*Deck is cut, cards right and left.*] Well, Hussar. . . . And you, Shvokhnev, what d'you say? [*Serving the cards.*] Peculiar run—the valet is done for, the nine takes. What have you there? Ah, the four also takes! Oh, the Hussar, splendid, he is! Do you notice, Ikharev, how he is raising all the time? Plays well already! And the ace is not come yet! Well, Shvokhnev, why don't you fill his glass? Ah, there it is, the ace! And Krugel is again winning! Dutchy always has luck at cards. Four wins, and the three! Bravo, Hussar! You hear, Shvokhnev, the Hussar has won five thousand already!

GLOV

Five hundred again! Let her go, that's the stuff!

UTESHITELNY

[*Cards right and left.*] The devil take it, the seven again. . . . No, lost! You've lost, Hussar! Well, what of it, it's nothing! Can't win every time—it's pure chance, that's all. Hey, Krugel, stop your figuring, play what you have in hand. Bravo, Hussar, won again! Congratulations, Hus-

sar! [*All drink and clink their glasses together.*] They say the queen of spades brings bad luck, but I don't believe it. . . . Do you remember, Shvokhnev, that brunette of yours that you used to call your queen of spades? I wonder where she is now, the dear one! Perhaps gone to the devil, who knows! Krugel, you've lost! [*To* IKHAREV.] Yours also, and you, too, Shvokhnev, hard luck! Ah, there, our Hussar has also busted.

GLOV

Damn it, the pot!

UTESHITELNY

Bravo, Lieutenant! That's the true blue! D'ye see, Shvokhnev, how the real insides will always come on top and show the real man, eh? You could see all the time that he is going to be a Hussar; but now—why he *is* a Hussar already. The right spunk, all right, that's what? Lost, Hussar!

GLOV

The pot!

UTESHITELNY

Ough, bravo, Hussar! For the whole fifty thousand! That's what I call good nerve! No, boys, you'll go a long way to find another like him, I tell you straight. . . . That's heroic, that's what it is! Busted, Hussar!

GLOV

The pot, damn it, the pot!

UTESHITELNY

Oh, ho, Hussar! For the entire hundred thousand! Some boy, ain't he! And his eyes, eh? Look at them, Shvokhnev, how they sparkle! This boy is a man, I tell you! A true hero, that's what! And still no king! Here, Shvokhnev, the queen of hearts for you! You, Dutchy, here, a seven for you! Wonderful game, these cards. And still no king—where the devil . . . strange—don't seem to be in the deck—ah! here he is, here! . . . You've lost, Hussar!

GLOV

[*Excitedly.*] Damn it, the whole damned pot!

UTESHITELNY

No, my boy, hold on a moment! You've already lost two hundred thousand. First you pay—you can't start a new game that way—we can't trust you so much.

GLOV

But why,—I haven't got any money now.

UTESHITELNY

Give us a check and sign it.

GLOV

Well, all right. [*Takes up a pen.*]

UTESHITELNY

And the authorisation to receive that money—you must give us that, too.

GLOV

Here, take it.

UTESHITELNY

Now sign this, and that. [*Hands him some papers.*]

GLOV

All right—I'll sign. [*Signing.*] Well, it's done. Let's play again!

UTESHITELNY

Oh, no, my boy! Show us your money first!

GLOV

You ain't afraid, are you? I'll pay up all right.

UTESHITELNY

Show the color of your money!

GLOV

Why . . . what's that? It's rank mean, that's what I say!

KRUGEL

Why mean? You must play straight.

IKHAREV

It is quite right.

SHVOKHNEV

You can't sit down to play without money—that don't go.

GLOV

Well, what do you want? Lend me some—I'll pay you double.

UTESHITELNY

We don't want any usury! Pay double, indeed! We'll pay you double ourselves if you'll lend us some cash.

GLOV

[*Desperately.*] Well, is that your last word? You won't play?

SHVOKHNEV

Bring some cash—we'll start another game at once.

GLOV

[*Pulling a revolver out of his pocket.*] Well, then, good bye! You won't see me again in this world. [*Rushes out.*]

UTESHITELNY

[*Fearfully.*] You! You! What's the matter with you! Are you daft! I must after him! He might really shoot himself. [*Rushes out.*]

IKHAREV

It will be hell to pay if that fool should shoot himself.

SHVOKHNEV

T'hell with him! Let him—but not just yet—we got to get that money first. That's the trouble!

KRUGEL

I fear the worst. Everything possible. . . .

[UTESHITELNY *drags* GLOV *back into the room, the revolver still in* GLOV's *grasp.*]

UTESHITELNY

What the 'ell, man, have you gone crazy? Sticking the gun into his mouth! Shame on you!

ALL

[*Approaching him anxiously.*] The idea! How can you!

SHVOKHNEV

A clever fellow—yet tries to shoot himself for such nonsense!

IKHAREV

Why, if everyone would be like that, the whole country would have to commit suicide! Every one has either lost or will lose. If people would not lose, how could any one win—consider that, man!

UTESHITELNY

You are just a fool, that's what—with your permission I must say it! You don't know what you are about. Can't you see it's lucky you have lost? Don't you feel you've made your career by losing?

GLOV

[*In irritation.*] You take me for a fool, don't you! Nice career! Lost two hundred thousand, damn my soul!

UTESHITELNY

Oh, you simpleton, you! Don't you know what it is worth to you in the regiment? Why, it's glory, man! Two hundred thousand—what of it! You've covered yourself with glory! Not a lieutenant yet, and already gambled two hundred thousand away! Why, man, the Hussars will consider you a hero!

GLOV

[*Gaining courage.*] You think I have no nerve? Well, if it comes to that, to hell with the damned

money! I'll show you I'm a man! Hurrah for the Hussar regiment!

UTESHITELNY

Bravo! That's the way to act! Hurrah for the Hussars! Hey, there, champagne!

[*Servants bring in champagne.*]

GLOV

[*Raising his glass.*] Long live the Hussars!

IKHAREV

Long live the Hussars, damn it all!

SHVOKHNEV

Ra, ra, ra! Long live the Hussars!

GLOV

T'hell with everything! What d'I care! [*Puts glass on the table.*] Only this—how will I get home? . . . Father . . . Father! . . . [*Grasping his head with both hands.*]

UTESHITELNY

Why go home? Nonsense! You don't have to!

GLOV

[*In great surprise.*] How? What d'you mean?

UTESHITELNY

Why, straight to your regiment, that's all! Why go home? We'll fix you up—give you enough for your uniform. Here, Shvokhnev, a few hundred we must give him right now—let the young lieutenant have his fling. He has—I've noticed—a black eyed beauty—eh?

GLOV

Damn it, I'll run right to her—take the fortress by assault!

UTESHITELNY

A real Hussar, all right! Eh, Shvokhnev, have you got two hundred?

IKHAREV

Here, let me give it to him! Let him have a good time!

GLOV

[*Taking the bills.*] Champagne!

ALL

Champagne!

[*Champagne is brought in.*]

GLOV

Hurrah for the Hussars!

UTESHITELNY

Hurrah! . . . Here, Shvokhnev, I got an idea! Let's give him a roll, as we used to do in our regiment! Now, get hold, every one!

[*They approach him, catch him by the arms and legs, and raise him up and down in the air, singing the regimental ditty:*]

We love and love you heartily,
You'll be our leader now!
Our hearts you've fired mightily,
For evermore, and evermore and now!

GLOV

[*With raised glass.*] Hurrah!

ALL

Hurrah! [*They let him down.* GLOV *dashes his glass to the floor, the others do the same, some breaking their glasses on the heels of their shoes.*]

GLOV

I am off straight to her!

UTESHITELNY

Can't we join you, eh, what?

GLOV

Not on your life! If you try it, the swords!

UTESHITELNY

A dare-devil, all right, all right! A jealous devil! Gentlemen, I'm sure he'll be the champion ruffian in his regiment, a fire-eater! Well, good bye, good bye, Hussar! Off to your lady love!

GLOV

Good bye!

SHVOKHNEV

Be sure you come later to tell us all about it. [*Exit* GLOV.]

UTESHITELNY

We got to humor him until we get our hands on the cash. Then he can go to hell.

SHVOKHNEV

I am only afraid there should be no delay about getting the money from the bank.

UTESHITELNY

Yes, there's the rub! But . . . well, you know, a little bit of persuasion—a bit of oiling—has to be done, my friends, to have things run smoothly.

[*Enter* ZAMUKHRISHKIN, *bank clerk, dressed shabbily in a worn old cut-away coat. Sticking his head through the door.*]

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

Permit me to inquire—is Alexander Mikhailovitch Glov here?

SHVOKHNEV

He has just left. Do you have business with him?

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

Why, yes, it's about some money matters.

UTESHITELNY

Who are you, please?

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

I am from the bank.

UTESHITELNY

Come right in, please. Have a seat, please. We are all very much interested in the matter, especially because we have made some friendly arrangements with Alexander Mikhailovitch. You will therefore understand that we shall all be very much obliged to you—you understand, don't you? He, and he, and he [*pointing with his finger at the others*] they will all owe you thanks. The main thing is to get the money as soon as possible.

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

Well, it will take two weeks at least.

UTESHITELNY

No, no, that's too long entirely. Don't forget that we shall know our obligation to you . . .

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

Well, that's all right—that's why I say two weeks—else it might take three months. We won't get the money for about another ten days yet, and there are several creditors waiting for large sums —three real estate men . . .

UTESHITELNY

That is all right about the others, but we . . . we must be on a friendly footing. Let's get acquainted a bit. Now, how are things with you? How about your job?

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

Well, the job—just so so, nothing much.

UTESHITELNY

Well, and on the side, you know,—let's speak plainly: how much graft?

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

You know yourself how it is—I've got to live.

UTESHITELNY

Of course. And the others there in the bank—guess, they are all good takers, eh?

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

Now you're making fun of me. But look here, gentlemen, you make fun of the little fish, but the big ones, you yourselves, for instance,—ain't it all the same graft? Only you call it by some high sounding name—contribution, donation here and there, but it's the same old thing. You're no better than small fry like myself.

UTESHITELNY

Come, come, now—no offence meant. Don't be angry, man—no hard feelings.

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

A man is a man for a' that, you know. One has his feelings and honor, gentlemen.

UTESHITELNY

All right, man, all right. Let's talk like good friends. Do you get along all right? How are things with you in general? Wife and family?

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

Yes, thank God. Two boys already in school, and two smaller ones, one quite a baby yet.

UTESHITELNY

Small ones, but I bet they know already how to . . . [*Makes the motion of accepting a bribe.*]

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

There you go again. Now, really, gentlemen. . .

UTESHITELNY

I am just joking, man—just among friends. Here, have a drink with us, to our friendship. [*They drink.*] Now, listen, good man. About that little business—we won't forget you, and you fix it there at the bank somehow—as quickly as possible, dear friend, yes?

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

I'll do the best I can.

UTESHITELNY

You promise? Remember, you'll get a good slice.

ZAMUKHRISHKIN

[*Rising from his chair.*] I'll try—the best I can. [*Exit.*]

UTESHITELNY

It's hell—how can we wait that long! [*Suddenly, as if thinking of some bright idea.*] Say, friends, I am going to run after him—maybe I can persuade him to manage it a bit sooner. The devil take him—I'll hand him a few bills right now. [*Runs off.*]

IKHAREV

Of course, the sooner we get it the better.

SHVOKHNEV

We need it badly—we are pressed for time.

KRUGEL

If he could only manage the fellow . . .

IKHAREV

Are your affairs so pressing . . .
[*Enter* UTESHITELNY.]

UTESHITELNY

[*Despairingly.*] Can't do it in less than four days. It's terrible. I don't know what to do—we can't wait that long.

IKHAREV

Why, what is the matter? Why such rush? Can't you wait four days?

SHVOKHNEV

That is just the point, Ikharev. Those four days are of utmost moment to us.

UTESHITELNY

Wait four days! Why, it's hell, I tell you! Don't you know that we are expected every minute at the big fair in Nijny? Well, we haven't told you yet, but four days ago we got word to rush to Nijny as soon as possible, with a little money to start

things. A big jobber there has closed a deal for half a million—getting it in cash on Tuesday, and another one has a quarter of a million with him, in cold cash, understand?

IKHAREV

Well, what then?

UTESHITELNY

How—what? Sure thing, that's what!

IKHAREV

You got a tip?

UTESHITELNY

Well, of course. D'you think we'd be so wild to go if our men hadn't the field all prepared and ready for us! It's all fixed—every minute is valuable.

IKHAREV

What are we sitting here for, then? Why, gentlemen, we've agreed to pool and act together!

UTESHITELNY

Well, that is our only chance. Listen, here's an idea! You are not in any hurry—no reason for you to rush just now. You have eighty thousand. Let us have it and we'll give you Glov's checks for it. You'll get almost two hundred thousand on

them—more than twice your amount—and you will be even doing us a favor, for we need the cash so badly now, we are ready to pay double for it.

IKHAREV

Why, of course. And to prove my friendship to you, [*goes to the cash box and takes out a large bundle of bills*] here, eighty thousand!

UTESHITELNY

Here are the checks. Now I'll go and fetch Glov. We must arrange the thing in proper form. Krugel, take the money to my room—here's the key to my cash box.

[*Exit* KRUGEL.]

Ah, if we could only manage to leave this evening! [*Exit.*]

IKHAREV

Of course, of course! You must not lose a minute unnecessarily.

SHVOKHNEV

And I advise you too not to waste time here. As soon as you get the money, come immediately to us. With two hundred thousand—we could work wonders, man! Why, we'd bust up the whole she-bang there! Oh, hell, I forgot to tell Krugel something important. . . . Just thought of it. . . . I'll be back in a minute. [*Exit hurriedly.*]

IKHAREV

[*Alone.*] Well, things seems to be moving, eh? This morning just eighty thousand, and now two hundred thousand! Not bad, not at all bad! Some other fellow got to slave a lifetime for it, work like a mule, lose his health, deprive himself of every pleasure, aye, even of comforts and necessities—and then he won't have it, either! And here—in a few hours—what do I say!—within a few minutes, practically—two hundred thousand! Not so bad, eh? You can say it quick, "Two hundred thousand!" but just try to get it! Ah, that's different! I might be still fooling around in the province there, in my estate, saving up a few pennies every year—bored to death in that god-forsaken hole, wasting my time with my renters and tenants—why, damn it, I want to be in decent company, spend my time with intelligent people. In the country I'd just get rusty and fat and stupid like the other landlords! Now I have an independent fortune—my time's my own. I can go where I will—meet whomever I will. That's life! And how do I come by all that, eh? They call it swindling, fraud! Nonsense! There's no swindle about it! Any fool can be a swindler and a cheat, but my line demands cleverness, study, practice! Well, suppose it is faking! What of it! Can you live without it? It's necessary—in a certain sense a pre-

caution. Suppose I didn't know all these fine points, the science of the thing—why, I'd be everybody's fool and swindled by everyone. Why, they *did* try to cheat me and beat me out of my money—but they saw with whom they had to deal, and they were damn glad to make friends with me. That's what! No, sir, brain work, that's the thing! That's what counts in this world! Without finesse you won't get far. That's the way I look at things: to live like the average man—well, any fool can do that! But to make one's way by his wits, by sheer cleverness and skill, to fool the other fellow and be fooled yourself—that's the point, that's the purpose and aim of life!

[*Enter* GLOV.]

GLOV

[*Coming in hastily.*] Where are they? I was just in their rooms—they ain't there!

IKHAREV

They were here. They've just left—be back in a minute.

GLOV

What! They've gone! And took your money?

IKHAREV

I have made some arrangements with them. It's up to you now.

[*Enter* ALEXEI, *the servant.*]

ALEXEI

[*To* GLOV.] You've been asking, sir, about the gentlemen?

GLOV

Yes.

ALEXEI

They have left the hotel, sir.

GLOV

How—left?

ALEXEI

Yes, sir. The carriage had been waiting a half an hour for them.

GLOV

[*With a motion of despair.*] Swindled—both of us!

IKHAREV

What's all this nonsense! What are you talking about, man! Utesh is due here any moment. You know that you are to pay *me* your whole indebtedness. They have turned it over to me.

GLOV

Indebtedness, hell! A hell of a lot you'll get! Don't you see they've made a fool of you! You're their sucker!

IKHAREV

Quit your monkey business, now! Seems you didn't get over your drunk yet!

GLOV

Guess we're both drunk! Wake up, man! D'ye think I am Glov? As much Glov as you're the Emperor of China!

IKHAREV

[*Getting uneasy.*] What are you driving at! You are talking through your head! Why, your father . . . and . . .

GLOV

The old fellow? In the first place, he ain't my father, and then, has such a devil of a fellow progeny? And his name ain't Glov—it's Krinitsin, that's what he is called, belongs to their own gang!

IKHAREV

Now, you, listen, you! Talk business! This is no joking matter!

GLOV

Jokes hell! I've been taken in myself, the same as you! I've played into their hands—see—they promised me three thousand for my services—and swindled me, damn them!

IKHAREV

[*Approaching him threateningly.*] 'Nough of your fooling, now! I tell you, you can't play this game with me, understand? Think I'm a fool, what? What d'you take me for? The authorisation papers, the check, the bank official, Zamukhrishkin. . . . I'll send for him at once!

GLOV

You stupid! He ain't no bank official, and his name isn't Zamukhrishkin. It's Murzafeikin, of their gang, too!

IKHAREV

[*Desperately.*] And you? Devil you, who are you?

GLOV

I? Well, I *was* a decent man—they've made me into a crook. Skinned me at the game—didn't leave me a shirt on my back. What was I to do? Starve to death? They promised me three thousand—to help skin you. See, now? I tell you straight—I'm honest with you.

IKHAREV

[*Enraged, catches him by the throat.*] You scoundrel . . .

ALEXEI

[*Aside.*] Getting too hot—I'd better get out of this! [*Exit.*]

IKHAREV

[*Pulling* GLOV.] I'll show you, you scoundrel. . . . Come, now, come . . .

GLOV

Where? Where to?

IKHAREV

[*Furiously.*] Where? To the police! I'll have the law on you!

GLOV

Why, man,—you have no right!

IKHAREV

What! No right . . . Rob me . . . like that . . . such swindle. . . . I have no right! I'll show you! . . . I'll get the whole police force after those thieves . . . those highwaymen. . . . I'll show them . . . taking advantage of confidence and honesty. . . . The law . . .

GLOV

You're crazy! You can't call the police! The law! Why, you yourself have plotted with them! Didn't you mean to swindle me, eh? To rob me

of the two hundred thousand you thought I had to get for father? And your deck, eh? From your own—your own handiwork! No, sir,—you better leave me be!

IKHAREV

[*In sudden realisation, despairingly.*] Hell. . . . Why . . . it's true . . . [*Falls weakly into a chair.* GLOV *meanwhile runs away.*] But . . . how devilish . . . what a hellish swindle . . .

GLOV

[*Putting his head through the door.*] Don't lose heart, man! You ain't lost everything—you still have Adelaida Ivanovna! [*Disappears.*]

IKHAREV

[*In rage.*] To hell with Adelaida Ivanovna! [*Grabs up the deck and throws it violently against the door—aces and kings fly about.*] Such scoundrels! . . . To think that the world is full of them! Shame upon it. . . . But it's enough to drive me crazy—how cleverly they did it—how devilishly clever! The father, and the son, the bank official, —damn it—a clean job—and I can't even get the law against them! [*Jumps up from the chair—walks up and down the room in great excitement.*] Is there any use then? All my cleverness, all my finesse—of what use? . . . To hell with it . . . it

ain't worth all the hard work—all my efforts—days and nights. Of what use? . . . First thing you know some scoundrel is there, cleverer than you, gets the best of you! A swindler that in one minute destroys the wonderful edifice I have been building for years, years . . . [*Hopelessly, with a wave of the hand.*] Rotten world, that's all! Just rotten! All swindlers. Only fools have luck—some bloke that don't know anything, don't have any brains, and never does anything except sit down at a penny game with second-hand cards!

END

MARRIAGE

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

Agafya Tikhonovna, *daughter of a merchant, the bride*

Arina Panteleymovna, *her aunt*

Fyokla Ivanovna, *professional matchmaker*

Ivan Kuzmitch Podkolyossin, *in the civil service*

Ilya Fomitch Kotchkarev, *his friend*

Ivan Pavlovitch Omelet, *in the civil service*

Anutchkin, *ex-infantry officer*

Baltazar Baltazarovitch Zhevakin, *sailor*

Dunyashka, *house servant*

Starikov, *merchant*

Stepan, *Podkolyossin's servant*

MARRIAGE

Act First

SCENE I

A Bachelor's Room

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Alone, lying on the couch and smoking his pipe.*] So, when you are alone, like this, and you think things over leisurely, you do come to feel that, after all, one ought to get married. Well, really—what kind of a life is it? You live, just live, like this—it's getting disgusting. And here I have again missed my chance! And why? Everything seemed all right, too! And the marriage broker has been coming for three months! Really, I'm getting ashamed of myself. Hey, there, Stepan!

SCENE II

Podkolyossin and Stepan

PODKOLYOSSIN

Has the matchmaker been here?

STEPAN

No, sir.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Did you see the tailor?

STEPAN

I did.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, is he making my frock-coat?

STEPAN

He's working on it.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Has he done much on it?

STEPAN

Well, considerable. He's started on the button-holes.

PODKOLYOSSIN

What do you say?

STEPAN

I say, he's started on the buttonholes.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, didn't he ask what your master wanted a frock-coat for?

STEPAN

No, he didn't ask.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Maybe he asked if your master was about to get married, eh?

STEPAN

No, he didn't say anything.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, did you see other frock-coats in his shop? He has many customers, hasn't he?

STEPAN

Yes, sir. I saw many frock-coats hanging there.

PODKOLYOSSIN

I guess, though, my cloth is of better quality than the others, eh?

STEPAN

To be sure, yours looks somewhat better.

PODKOLYOSSIN

What do you say?

STEPAN

I say that yours looks somewhat better.

PODKOLYOSSIN

All right. But didn't the tailor make some remark about the superior quality of my cloth?

STEPAN

No.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Maybe he did hint that your master means to get married? Now, didn't he?

STEPAN

No, he didn't hint at it.

PODKOLYOSSIN

But you told him that I was in the Government service, and what position I hold?

STEPAN

That I did.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, what did he say then?

STEPAN

He said he'd do his best.

PODKOLYOSSIN

All right, you can go now.

[*Exit* STEPAN.]

SCENE III

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Alone.*] Now it is my opinion that a black frock-coat looks a bit more dignified. Colored ones

—well, that's more for the smaller fry—for a clerk or some such. Those of a higher rank should observe, so to speak, the . . . eh, what's the word? Can't think of it—and a good word, too—clean forgotten. Well, old boy, say what you will, but a Privy Councillor—ranking with a Colonel, if you please, even if his uniform is without epaulets. Hey, Stepan!

SCENE IV

PODKOLYOSSIN

You didn't forget to buy me shoe-blacking, did you?

STEPAN

I bought it.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Where did you buy it? Did you go to that little shop that I told you about—on the Voznessensky Boulevard?

STEPAN

Yes, sir, that's where I got it.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, is it good stuff?

STEPAN

Pretty good.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Have you cleaned my boots with it?

STEPAN

I have.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, did you put a good shine on them?

STEPAN

They shine all right, fine stuff.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Tell me, when you bought the blacking, didn't the man ask why your master wanted such fine stuff?

STEPAN

No, he didn't ask.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Didn't he remark that your master was perhaps thinking of getting married, eh?

STEPAN

No, he made no remarks.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, all right, you can go!

SCENE V

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Alone.*] Of course, may seem unimportant—boots, just a pair of boots, but when you consider that if they are badly made—if they don't fit just right, or maybe some vile blacking on them—why, what respect can you command in good society? None at all! . . . And if you have corns to boot,—why, it's simply awful! I'm ready to suffer anything, God knows! But save me from corns. Hey, Stepan!

SCENE VI

STEPAN

Yes, sir?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Did you tell the shoemaker that your master had corns?

STEPAN

I did.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, what did he say?

STEPAN

He said: "All right."

[*Exit* STEPAN.]

SCENE VII

PODKOLYOSSIN

If you consider it well, it's a bothersome thing, after all, this marriage business! It's this and that and something else again—and seeing to it that everything is just right. No, the devil take it, it isn't as simple as it looks. Hey, Stepan! [*Enter* STEPAN.] I wanted to tell you . . .

STEPAN

The old woman is here.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Ah, she's come! Call her in. [*Exit* STEPAN.] Yes, it isn't so simple . . . it's something . . . not so easy.

SCENE VIII

PODKOLYOSSIN

Ah, good morning, good morning, Fyokla Ivanovna! Well, what now? How is it? Here, take a chair, sit down, and tell me everything. Well, how now? how is it? How is she—eh, what's her name—yes, Melanya? . . .

FYOKLA

Agafya Tikhonovna.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Yes, of course, Agafya Tïkhonovna. To be sure, some lass of forty, eh?

FYOKLA

Oh, no, sirree! You'll see—when you are married you'll thank me every day for it.

PODKOLYOSSIN

You are fibbing, Fyokla Ivanovna!

FYOKLA

Too old for that, my dear. I ain't lying. Only curs lie!

PODKOLYOSSIN

But the dowry, eh? How about the dowry, that's the question. Come, tell me again about it.

FYOKLA

The dowry—I've told you: A brown-stone house, my dear, two stories high, mind you, and profitable, that's what! A real pleasure, that's what one gets from it. The grocery man alone pays seven hundred rent for it; and the saloon in the cellar draws a big crowd, too. And two wooden wings, mind you, that's what! One entirely of wood, the other on a stone foundation—and each brings in about four hundred in rent, that's what! And there is also an orchard in the Viborg district. It's rented

for three years to a merchant—grows cabbages—that's what! And such a good man, too, the merchant, he is! Never a drop does he take, that's what! And three children he has raised, sons. Two already married, and the third, why, "the third," he says, says he, "he's young yet, let him help in the grocery," he says. That's what! "I'm old," says he, "let him help with the cabbage," he says, "will be a bit easier for me,"—that's what!

PODKOLYOSSIN

But how is she? What does she look like?

FYOKLA

Beauti*fool!* That's what! Peaches and cream, such a complexion! And sweet! Words can't describe it, that's what! Well, well, you'll have nothing to complain of, never fear, you'll be more than satisfied! And you'll tell everyone, friend and enemy, that you are satisfied. "Well, well," you'll say, "that Fyokla Ivanovna, I have cause to be thankful to her." That's what!

PODKOLYOSSIN

But, after all, she has no rank, though!

FYOKLA

Daughter of a well-to-do merchant, my dear! And such a one: fit for a general, that's what! She

won't look at any merchant, though! "My husband," she says, says she, "even if he ain't handsome, he must be of the nobility!" Yes, sir, that's what! A grand one, all right, all right. And on a holiday, when she is all dressed up in silk, just fit to kill, that's what! By God, it just makes zhoo-zhoo all the time, just a pleasure, that's what! A reg'lar duchess, she is, all right, all right!

PODKOLYOSSIN

You understand, of course, why I am asking you, don't you? Don't forget I am a man of rank, a Privy Councillor, you know. Well, you understand . . .

FYOKLA

To be sure, to be sure, why shouldn't I understand? But we've had a Privy Councillor for her, —refused him, that's what! Didn't please her! Nice looking he was, too, very dignified, but a queer way he had about him: every time he'd open his mouth, out came a lie. Guess he couldn't help it —the good Lord made him so, I fancy. Just couldn't help it, that's what. Not a word that wasn't a lie. God's will, I guess.

PODKOLYOSSIN

But haven't you got someone else, some other lady?

FYOKLA

What d'you want another one for? She is the very best of the lot.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Now, now! Really the very best?

FYOKLA

You'd go further and fare worse, s'help me! That's what!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, I shall think of it, I'll consider it, my good woman. Come to see me again day after tomorrow. We will then talk a little more about it. Just like this, you know: I'll lie here on the divan, and you will be sitting there, just where you are now, and you will be relating . . .

FYOKLA

Merciful God! Why, my dear, here it's nigh three months that I am coming to you and telling you and 'lating to you, and not a bit of use all this time. Sits there half-dressed, puffs at his pipe all the time, and that's all. What's the use, then? That's what, my dear!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, do you think marriage is such a light matter? Like calling Stepan there to get my boots, put

them on and be off, eh? No, my dear woman, one must consider the matter well, weigh it on all sides and think over it.

FYOKLA

Well, what of it! Of course, you must think it over and have a good look at it. That's what the goods are there for, to be looked over! Well, why not take a look at it right now? Tell Stepan to hand you your coat—it's a nice morning—we'll go and look.

PODKOLYOSSIN

What, now! Right now! But—no, don't you see it's a bit cloudy. I might start out, and then suddenly it might rain, and I'd get wet all over.

FYOKLA

Oh, you! The worse for you! Look here, man, you have no time to lose: I can see the grey hair on your head, and soon you will not be fit any more for the marriage business. A Privy Councillor! Not such a big cheese. I can find better men for the bride, that's what!

PODKOLYOSSIN

What nonsense are you talking there! What d'you mean by saying there is a grey hair in my head, eh? Nothing of the kind! [*Feels at his hair.*]

FYOKLA

Why shouldn't there be a grey hair! Man lives and grey hair will come, that's what! You needn't be so touchy, either! And not so pertic'ler! This one don't suit him, and that one won't do—what d'you want, anyway? Why, I have a Captain in view, a real Captain, some man, I tell you—you don't come up to his shoulder, that's what! And his voice—got a voice like a river-boat. A real man, that's what!

PODKOLYOSSIN

You are lying—I'll just take a look at the mirror—pure invention that I have a grey hair! Hey, Stepan, there! Bring me the mirror. No, no, wait, I'll go and look myself. The idea! A grey hair! Why, God forbid, that's worse than the pox! [*Goes into the other room.*]

SCENE IX

KOTCHKAREV

[*Rushing in.*] Podkolyossin, hey, where are you! [*Noticing* FYOKLA.] What, you here?! What do you want here, eh? Say, you! Why the deuce did you ever marry me?

FYOKLA

Well, why not? What's wrong about it? You did the right thing.

KOTCHKAREV

Right thing, indeed! Wonderful thing—a wife! I'd do better without one!

FYOKLA

Then why did you insist? You kept begging me: marry me, little gran'mother, marry me! Didn't ye?

KOTCHKAREV

You old hag, you! How you talk! And now, what are you doing here? Can it be that old Podkolyossin wants to . . .

FYOKLA

Why not! God has sent a blessing . . .

KOTCHKAREV

What! Really? Ah, the scoundrel, never a word to me! Just think of it, not a word to me! Secretly, eh?

SCENE X

[*Enter* PODKOLYOSSIN, *carrying a hand-mirror. Absorbed in examining his hair.*]

KOTCHKAREV

[*Stealing up from behind, frightens him.*] Humph!

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Startled, drops the mirror.*] Madman! Why —what do you mean, are you crazy! Such a trick; Why, you've scared me so, my heart has stopped beating.

KOTCHKAREV

All right, never mind, it was just in fun.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Fine fun! Why, you've frightened me out of my wits. And look at the mirror—smashed to pieces! You thought it was a gift, huh? An expensive thing —imported from England.

KOTCHKAREV

Enough, now! I'll get you another mirror.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Yes, you will! I know those other mirrors, those cheap things: one looks ten years older in them, and all out of shape.

KOTCHKAREV

Listen, old boy! It's me that ought to be angry with you. To think that you are hiding it from your best friend! Getting married, aren't you!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Nonsense! Never thought of it!

KOTCHKAREV

There's the evidnece! [*Pointing at* FYOKLA.] There she is—we know the bird! Well, well, all right! After all, nothing wrong about it. A Christian duty; even necessary for the fatherland. It's all right, old man, just leave it to me, I'll manage the business. [*To* FYOKLA.] Now, speak: how and what and so forth. Of the nobility—daughter of a merchant—or what? What's her name?

FYOKLA

Agafya Tikhonovna.

KOTCHKAREV

Agafya Tikhonovna Brandakhlistova?

FYOKLA

Oh, no—Kuperdyagina.

KOTCHKAREV

Lives in the "Six Store" Street, eh?

FYOKLA

Wrong again. It's nearer to the Peski, in the Soapy Alley.

KOTCHKAREV

Sure thing! That's it! Right back of the grocery, wooden house.

FYOKLA

It ain't back of the grocery—it's behind the saloon, that's what.

KOTCHKAREV

How, back of the saloon? Where's the saloon?

FYOKLA

Well, it's this way: you turn into the alley and you face the shed. After the shed, you just turn to the left and there it is. That is, there is the wooden house, kind of frame building, you understand. That's where the seamstress lives, the one that had the Senator's secretary, you know. You don't need to go to the seamstress, but right back of her is the other house, stone one. That's the house, that's where she lives, Agafya Tikhonovna, I mean, the bride.

KOTCHKAREV

Fine! Now I'll attend to everything. And you —you go now, no use your hanging around here. We don't need you any more.

FYOKLA

What d'you mean? Don't need me, indeed! You ain't going to fix the marriage yourself?

KOTCHKAREV

Sure I will! Don't mix in any more.

FYOKLA

The shameless thing! Why, that's not a man's business. Now, leave it alone, will you?

KOTCHKAREV

Go on now, go! You don't understand anything in these matters. Get out now!

FYOKLA

Robber, that's what you are! Stealing a piece of bread out of my mouth, that's what! Such meanness! If I had known it before, I wouldn't have told him a thing! [*Exit in high dudgeon.*]

SCENE XI

KOTCHKAREV

Well, my boy, this is not a matter that can wait. Come, we'll go now.

PODKOLYOSSIN

But—why, I haven't yet—I've only been thinking . . .

KOTCHKAREV

Nonsense, nonsense! No fooling! I'll marry you so quick you won't know it. We go right now to the bride and everything will be settled in a jiffy.

PODKOLYOSSIN

How you talk! The idea of going right away!

KOTCHKAREV

What's the difficulty? Why not go at once? Look here, man, see what your bachelor life is like. Just take a look at this room; what disgusting disorder! There is a dirty boot, just lying around like that! And here is the washstand, and a pile of tobacco on the table, and you yourself lying around all day on that divan, just lazying your time away. Is that the way to live? Now, just tell me!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, it's true, of course. I know there is no order here.

KOTCHKAREV

That's it! Now, when you'll have a wife, you won't know yourself any more. It will all be different. The couch will be here, a little puppy nearby, a song-bird in a cage, a lady's work-basket. . . . Just imagine, you will sit here on the divan, and all at once a sweet little dove of a wife will be near you, right at your side, and her hand, her sweet little hand, will . . .

PODKOLYOSSIN

Ah! Really, you know, when I think of it, how delightful a woman's hands can be—why, you know, just like cream . . .

KOTCHKAREV

Only hands! Why, boy, as if they have only hands! . . . I tell you, man. . . . What's the use: what haven't they got!!

PODKOLYOSSIN

And to tell you the truth, I would just love to have some sweet one beside me.

KOTCHKAREV

Well, you know it all yourself. . . . Now, there is nothing more to be done than to arrange things. Don't worry about anything. Just leave it to me —the wedding feast and everything else, I'll attend to all that is necessary. Of course, champagne, no less than a dozen bottles—no, sir, can't do with less,—don't contradict, now. Madeira, also, at least half a dozen. And the bride, no doubt, has a heap of aunts and relatives—you must consider that, you know; we must do it on the proper scale. Rhein-wein?—Ah, no, let that go, don't need it. But about the dinner—well, just be easy on that score. I know a caterer that supplies the Court—I tell you that fellow will give us such a feed, it will just make you burst.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Why, man, you are rushing matters as if there was really going to be a wedding.

KOTCHKAREV

Of course there is! Why not? And why delay matters? You are agreed, aren't you?

PODKOLYOSSIN

I? Well, no, I am . . . well, not entirely.

KOTCHKAREV

I like that! Why, you've just said yourself that you are willing.

PODKOLYOSSIN

I only said that it wouldn't be a bad thing.

KOTCHKAREV

What's the matter with you? Why, the whole thing was almost arranged, and now all of a sudden. . . . Don't you like married life?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Of course, it would be nice.

KOTCHKAREV

Well, then, what's the trouble? What's the obstacle?

PODKOLYOSSIN

No obstacle at all, only it is a bit strange. . . .

KOTCHKAREV

Strange! Nothing strange about it!

PODKOLYOSSIN

It *is* strange. All the time unmarried, and suddenly married!

KOTCHKAREV

Now, ain't you ashamed of yourself! No, I see I must speak earnestly with you. I'll talk to you like a father. Now, look at me, just look at me, straight in the face. And now take a look at yourself, just as you look at me. Well, what are you, what do you amount to? Nothing! A mere nothing, you are just a flea. What do you live for? What purpose and meaning is there in your life? Just tell me that! Take a look at yourself in the mirror: What do you see there, eh? A fool, that's all! But think—you will have a bunch of kids about you—who says two or three! Why, may be six, half a dozen of them, and all of them will resemble you—just think!—like two drops of water! Now you are alone, a Privy Councillor or some Secretary or something, whatever you are, and what of it? But then there will be a whole brood of little secretaries all around you, little kiddies all over the house, and one pretty one will crawl all over you, and with his little baby fingers he will pull at your side-whiskers and you will bark like a puppy: Wow, Wow, Aw, Aw! Just like that! Is there any greater bliss than that, now, tell me!

PODKOLYOSSIN

But they are noisy little scamps—they will break things and even mess my papers up.

KOTCHKAREV

Let them play around, man. The main thing is that they all resemble you! That's the point!

PODKOLYOSSIN

That's funny, you know. Really: just a wee bit of a thing, a little puppy, and already resembling you.

KOTCHKAREV

Funny! I should say it is! Well, then, let's go to her.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Y-e-s, all right.

KOTCHKAREV

Hey, Stepan, help your master dress! Quick!

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Dressing in front of the mirror.*] I think—I ought to put on my white waistcoat.

KOTCHKAREV

Nonsense. It doesn't matter.

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Putting on the collar.*] Damn that laundress—the collar won't stand up right. You tell her, Stepan, that if she can't do better I'll hire another one. She probably spends all her time with her lovers instead of tending to the work.

KOTCHKAREV

Hurry, man, hurry a bit!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Just a moment now. [*Puts on his frock-coat and sits down.*] Listen, friend—you know what? You better go yourself.

KOTCHKAREV

What now? Are you crazy? *I* should go? Who is going to marry her—you or I?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Somehow I don't feel like going. . . . Maybe tomorrow.

KOTCHKAREV

You're out of your senses! I ask you, are you an idiot? All ready to go, and now all of a sudden changing your mind. I say, if you act like that, you are a pig and a scoundrel, that's what you are!

PODKOLYOSSIN

What are you calling me names for? What for? What have I done to you?

KOTCHKAREV

You're a pig, a fool, an imbecile! Everybody will tell you that! Just an imbecile, even if you are a Privy Councillor. Here I am trying my best for you, and you—— Why just sprawling on the couch, damn it. Fool, what are you looking at me for? You're just a blockhead, a . . . I'd call you . . . well, I don't want to be indecent, but you are an old woman, worse than an old woman!

PODKOLYOSSIN

How you talk! [*Lowering his voice.*] Here is my servant and you use such language to me in his presence. Have you no consideration?

KOTCHKAREV

Consideration! After letting a fellow down like this, who could help calling you names? You have decided to get married, like a decent man; you've listened to reason. And suddenly it's *no,* without any rhyme or reason, just out of stubbornness, like some wooden Indian. . . .

PODKOLYOSSIN

All right, all right, stop it. I'll go. What are you shouting for?

KOTCHKAREV

"I'll go!" Of course, you'll go; what else is there to be done. [*To* STEPAN.] Give him his hat and coat!

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*At the door.*] You are such a queer fellow. Can't say a word to you but what you call me names. You have no manners at all.

KOTCHKAREV

It's all right now. Let's go. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE XII

A room in the house of AGAFYA TIKHONOVNA. AGAFYA TIKHONOVNA *is telling her fortune with cards. Her aunt,* ARINA PANTELEYMOVNA, *is near her.*

AGAFYA

Again, auntie, a journey. The King of Clubs is in it! . . . oh tears . . . and . . . a love letter to the left, the Jack of Spades, also interested, but some villainous woman is in the way. . . .

ARINA

Who can that King of Clubs be?

AGAFYA

I don't know.

ARINA

I know who.

AGAFYA

Who, then?

ARINA

Who else but that good merchant, Alexei Dmitrovitch Starikov, the one who sells cloth.

AGAFYA

No, I am sure it's not him. I'll bet it ain't.

ARINA

Don't be stubborn, Agafya Tikhonovna. Isn't he red-headed? There is no other King of Clubs.

AGAFYA

No, it can't be. The King of Clubs here must surely be of the nobility. How can it be a merchant? It's a far cry from a merchant to the King of Clubs.

ARINA

Ah, my dear, you wouldn't have talked like this when your good father was alive,—may the Lord bless his memory. Your father was a man, a true man, my dear. Did he care for the nobility? Not he! Remember how he'd strike the table with his big fist and thunder, "I don't give a red copper for anyone who's ashamed of being a merchant!" "Never will I give my daughter even to a Colonel," he'd say;

"let others do it, but I won't, never! And I won't give my son to the army, either!" That's how he talked! "What!" he'd say, "don't a merchant serve the Tsar as well as others, eh?" And his fist would come down upon the table, you'd think some artillery was hitting it. A fist, I tell you, like a hundredweight, and temperamental,—just look out! To tell the truth, your dead mother might still be among the living if he hadn't been so free with his big fist.

AGAFYA

God forbid I should have such a bad-tempered husband. No, never will I marry a merchant!

ARINA

But Alexei Dmitrovitch isn't like that at all.

AGAFYA

I won't have him! I won't have him! He's got a beard: when he is eating, everything must be running down his beard. Fie! No, I don't want him, I won't! Never!

ARINA

But it ain't so easy to find a good husband among the nobility. They ain't picked up on the street, you know.

AGAFYA

Fyokla Ivanovna will find one all right. She has promised to get the very best one for me.

ARINA

Fyokla, indeed! Such a liar!

SCENE XIII

FYOKLA

Ah, Arina Panteleymovna, it's a sin for you to talk like that behind my back.

AGAFYA

Oh, is that you, Fyokla Ivanovna! Tell me, quick, what's the news? You got something, yes?

FYOKLA

Sure, sure, my dear, but first let me catch my breath. How you rush me! I have been working for you all right, my dear. Where haven't I been? How many places haven't I visited, private houses, and offices, and the ministries, and what not. And do you know, one old hag of a woman almost beat me up. That old shrew that married the Aferovs, why, she threatened me: "You so and so," she raved at me, "you such and such a one, you're taking my business away, and you'd better keep to your own quarter of the city!" "I will do all I can for my young lady," says I to her, that's what I did, straight to her face! That's what. And what a fine lot to select from I've brought you, my dear. The world

was created a long time ago, dearie, but such bridegrooms there never was before, that's what! This very day they'll be here, and I've just run in for a minute to have you get ready, my dear.

AGAFYA

Not today? Dearest Fyokla, I'm afraid!

FYOKLA

No cause to fear, child. They won't hurt you. Just a domestic matter: they'll come, they'll take a look, and that's all. And you'll look them over, too: if they won't please you, well—let them go back, that's what.

ARINA

Well, did you really get good ones?

AGAFYA

How many of them?

FYOKLA

About six of 'em.

AGAFYA

[*Cries out.*] Oh, my!

FYOKLA

What, dearie, don't be frightened. More to choose from: if one won't do, another will.

AGAFYA

But are they of the nobility?

FYOKLA

Every single one of 'em. Noblemen—all of 'em, such noblemen there never was before, that's what.

AGAFYA

What kind, then; tell me.

FYOKLA

Splendid ones, all very good and proper. The first, Baltazar Baltazarovitch Zhevakin, a sweet one, served in the navy. Just the man for you! He says he wants a bride that's a bit buxom, he don't like 'em hungry-looking, no skinny ones for him. And Ivan Pavlovitch, that's the one in high civil service, oh, he's a gentleman of importance, one can hardly get to him. Himposing looking, that's what he is, and well fed all right. He ain't no common folk, sure, my dearie. You should have just heerd 'im shout at me: "Don't you give me any gaff about the bride being so and so. No nonsense, woman! Ye jest tell me what she's worth—how much cash there is in it, and real estate." I tell 'im, so and so much. "Ye lie, ye beast," he thundered, and you know, my dear, he switched in such cuss words, it's indecent to repeat 'em to you. I knew at once that he's some person of importance, that's what!

AGAFYA

Well, and who else?

FYOKLA

There is also Nikanor Ivanovitch Anutchkin, a delicate one, he is, and lips!—my, I tell you, lips like raspberries, ready to eat. Nice man, very. "Give me," he says, says he, "a bride that's good-looking, well brought up, and must speak French." That's what! Yes, my dear, there's one for you, fine as silk, and feet—oh, the sweetest feet, so small and narrow, wee ones . . .

AGAFYA

Oh, his feet! No, I never cared for those fine ones with small feet. Not to my taste somehow.

FYOKLA

If you like something more solid, so t' speak, then take Ivan Pavlovitch. A better one would be hard to find. No use talking—that's a gentleman all right, all right: he'd hardly squeeze through this door, he's so grand.

AGAFYA

How old might he be?

FYOKLA

Oh, he's quite young yet: about fifty and maybe not that much.

AGAFYA

What is his name?

FYOKLA

Ivan Pavlovitch Omelet.

AGAFYA

Is that a name?

FYOKLA

His name.

AGAFYA

Oh, Lord, what a name! Why, Fyokla dear, if I should marry him, suddenly my name would be Agafya Omelet, Mrs. Omelet! Oh, my! Never, never!

FYOKLA

But my dear, what's in a name! Believe me, there are worse names in the world. Why, there are names that just make you feel like spitting out and crossing yourself, that's what! But, after all, if you don't find the name to your taste, then take Baltazar Baltazarovitch Zhevakin. None better, my dear.

AGAFYA

What kind of hair has he?

FYOKLA

Nice hair.

AGAFYA

And his nose?

FYOKLA

Nose also good. Everything in its place, my dear. Nothing wrong and nothing missing, believe me. Only that . . . well, in his rooms there is just . . . well, there is nothing there, clean as a whistle, only an old stove pipe there, not a stick of furniture.

AGAFYA

Whom else have you?

FYOKLA

Akinf Stepanovitch Panteleyev, a man of rank—he stutters a bit, but otherwise splendid and very modest in his demands. A high officer.

ARINA

Oh, all you do is spout about officers, official rank. All nonsense! Does he drink, that's the question. Tell us that!

FYOKLA

Drink? Well, I won't lie, he drinks a bit, of course. What high government official don't drink! But he is as quiet as a lamb, I assure you.

AGAFYA

No, I won't have a drunkard!

FYOKLA

As you wish, my dear. Don't like one, take another. Plenty to choose from. But, between us,

what if a man takes a drink now and then! An' perhaps a bit too much. He ain't drunk all the week round, is he? Some days he is sure to be sober.

AGAFYA

Anyone else?

FYOKLA

There is . . . but he's such a . . . Let 'im be. These are better.

AGAFYA

But who is he?

FYOKLA

I don't care to talk about him. It's true, he's a titled one, a Privy Councillor, but you won't raise him with a crowbar: can't pull him out of his house.

AGAFYA

Who else is there, then? You said there were six, but you mentioned only five.

FYOKLA

Ain't you got enough with five, my dear? A minute ago you were scared at so many, and now—you're a brazen one!

ARINA

What good are they all, these titled ones of yours, even if there are six of them! One good merchant is better than all of them.

FYOKLA

Ah, no, Arina Panteleymovna, you're wrong there! A nobleman is a nobleman; you can't compare a mere merchant with a man of title and rank. A nobleman's more respectable, sure enough.

ARINA

Respectable, fiddlesticks! Look at Alexei Dmitrovitch, a merchant, but that's a man for you! What expensive furs he wears, a fine sleigh, and blooded horses . . .

FYOKLA

But a man of rank will meet him, raise his shoulders with the big epaulets on them—like this—and say: "Hey, you, swine of a merchant, turn out of my way!" That's what! Or he'll say: "Now, you pig, show me your finest plush goods," and the merchant will bow low, "Yes, sir; yes sir, if you please, sir." And the nobleman will say: "You stupid, take your hat off before your betters!" That's what!

ARINA

But the merchant, if he is so minded, will refuse to sell and won't give your nobleman the cloth. And your nobleman will remain as naked as his mother bore him.

FYOKLA

And the nobleman will out with his sword and cut the merchant in two.

ARINA

And the merchant will report him to the police.

FYOKLA

And the nobleman will go to the Mayor.

ARINA

And the merchant will go to the Governor.

FYOKLA

And the nobleman . . .

ARINA

You're a liar! The Governor is higher than the Mayor—don't tell me, now! Nobleman, nobleman! A fig for your nobleman! Don't he also pull his hat off before . . . [*Loud bell outside.*] Someone's ringing.

FYOKLA

My, my,—that's them!

ARINA

Who, them?

FYOKLA

Them—some one of those five.

AGAFYA

[*Jumping up.*] Oh, my!

ARINA

Good Lord, why, the room isn't in order! [*Excitedly runs about the room, snatching a thing here and there.*] The napkin, the napkin! That dirty napkin on the table! Dunyashka! Dunyashka! Quick! [*Servant girl appears.*] Hurry! A clean napkin! [*Grabs the napkin off the table and rushes about like one possessed.*]

AGAFYA

Oh, auntie, what am I to do? I have nothing but my shirt on!

ARINA

Run quick, my dear, and dress. [*Rushes about the room.* DUNYASHKA *brings a napkin. The bell rings again.*] Hurry, Dunyashka, tell 'em, "Just a minute!" [DUNYASHKA *shouts through the door:* "*Just a minute!*"]

AGAFYA

Auntie, dear, my dress isn't ironed!

ARINA

The Lord have mercy! Put something else on!

FYOKLA

[*Running in.*] Why don't you come! Agafya Tikhonovna, quicker, dearie! [*Another ring.*] My, my, he's waiting!

ARINA

Dunyashka, let him in and ask him to wait a moment.

[DUNYASHKA *runs out into the corridor and opens the outside door. Voices are heard: "At home?" "Yes, sir, please step in." The three women all struggle to get a look at the visitor through the keyhole.*]

AGAFYA

Oh, he's so fat!

FYOKLA

He's coming, coming in, all right.

[*All rush out of the room pell-mell.*]

SCENE XIV

DUNYASHKA

Please wait here. [*Exit.*]

OMELET

Well, I can wait a moment—but not very long. Left the Department just for a second. What if the Chief should suddenly take it into his head to ask for me. "Where is he?" "Went to look a bride over." He'd give me a bride, all right! But I must examine the matter again. [*Takes a paper out of his pocket and reads.*] "Stone two-story house."

[*Raises his eyes, observes the room.*] Correct! [*Continues to read.*] "Two wings: wing on stone foundation, wing wooden. . . ." Well, the wooden one is pretty rotten. "A chaise, a sleigh with hand-worked design. . . ." Probably old junk. But the old woman asserted it was good stuff. Well, maybe, we'll see. "Two dozen silver spoons. . . ." Of course, silver spoons are needed in married life. "Two fox furs. . . ." Hm! "Four large quilts of down, two small ones. . . ." [*Makes a significant grimace.*] "Six silk dresses and six cotton ones, two nightgowns and two. . . ." Well, that's nothing! "Linen, napkins. . . ." Well, that's in the woman's line. But it will all have to be counted all right. Now they promise, of course—house, and carriage and so on, but when I am married I may find only the quilts and nightgowns.

[*Bell rings.* DUNYASHKA *rushes in and runs across the room into the corridor. Voices:* "*At home?*" "*Yes, sir.*"]

SCENE XV

DUNYASHKA

Wait here, please. They'll be here immediately.

[*Exit. The newcomer,* ANUTCHKIN, *bows to* OMELET.]

OMELET

'Morning!

ANUTCHKIN

I presume I have the honor of meeting the father of the young lady?

OMELET

Nothing of the kind! I have no children.

ANUTCHKIN

Beg your pardon, beg pardon!

OMELET

[*Aside.*] This fellow's mug looks somewhat suspicious to me. Wonder if he isn't here on the same business as myself. [*Aloud.*] I suppose you have come to call on the young lady?

ANUTCHKIN

Well, that is . . . I mean . . . I have been out for a walk and I have just dropped in.

OMELET

[*Aside.*] Liar, filthy liar! Out for a walk! He wants to marry her, the scoundrel!

[*Bell rings.* DUNYASHKA *runs across the room to open the outside door. Voices: "At home?" "Yes, sir!"*]

SCENE XVI

ZHEVAKIN

[*To* DUNYASHKA.] Please, dearie, brush me off a bit. . . . Such a dusty street. . . . There, on my sleeve, pick that off. [*Turns around.*] Good! Thanks, dearie. Ah, brush off the back a little, please. Feels like some insect. Is there, dearie? Thanks, thanks. Here a bit yet. [*Tries to pull down his short sleeve, the while observing* ANUTCHKIN *and* OMELET.] Fine English cloth, you know. And how it wears! 'Twas in '95, when our squadron was in Sicily, myself a marine then, I bought this cloth and made me a uniform out of it; in '801, under Tsar Paul, I was made a lieutenant, and the cloth was as good as new yet. In '814 we circled the globe, and the stuff held out, only the seams got loose a bit. In '815 I was pensioned, and just had the thing renovated, and now it's ten years since and still it's almost like new. Thanks, dearie, my little beauty. [*Waves his hand to* DUNYASHKA, *then goes to the mirror, and smoothes his hair.*]

ANUTCHKIN

Permit me to ask . . . you mention Sicily—what kind of a country is it?

ZHEVAKIN

Wonderful! We stay 34 days there, and I kin tell you the country is grand. What mountains, and the woods, real pomegranate, and everywhere Italian wenches, little roses they are, sweet things, you just want to kiss 'em.

ANUTCHKIN

And are they educated?

ZHEVAKIN

I should say they be! Educated like our countesses. Often, when out for a constitutional—well, you know, a young lieutenant, here epaulets [*indicating his shoulders*] gold braid, and those black-eyed vixens—you know—every house there has a little balcony, or verander, and the roofs are flat, just like this floor here—so, you just strut along the street, and there sits one of them beauties. . . . Naturally, of course, you don't want to appear like a boor. . . . [*He makes a bow and waves his hand*] but she just so. . . . [*Makes slight motion with his hand.*] She's of course dressed like a lady—some silk thing, light stuff, almost see through, feminine pretty things, ear-rings . . . well, just made to bite into. . . .

ANUTCHKIN

Permit another question, sir: what language do they speak?

ZHEVAKIN

All speak French in Sicily, naturally.

ANUTCHKIN

Really, every young lady speaks French?

ZHEVAKIN

No exception. You'll hardly believe it—it sounds so strange, but we stayed there 34 days, and in all that time we didn't hear a word of Russian. Think of it!

ANUTCHKIN

Not a word?

ZHEVAKIN

Nary a word. And I'm not speaking of their noblemen and signors and other such officers of theirs. Just take the common man there, some filthy fellow that carries about all kinds of stuff on his neck, and just say to him: "Give us some bread, good man." He won't understand—I swear to you, he won't. But tell him in French: "Dateci del pane" or "portate vino!" he'll get you, sure enough, and he'll run and fetch it right, every time.

OMELET

Interesting country, that Sicily. But tell me, friend, how about the peasant there? What is he like? Like the Russian muzhik, is he? Broad of shoulder and tills the ground? Or doesn't he?

ZHEVAKIN

That I cannot tell you—whether they till the soil or not—I didn't notice it. But about tobacco snuffing, that I know. Not only do they all snuff it, but they actually stuff it into their mouths! All of 'em! Another thing, travelling is cheap there: it's all water there, almost everywhere, and gondolas all around and about. . . . Naturally you see in them a sweet little bouquet of an Italian dame—just a waist and a kerchief on! . . . We had with us also some English officers: people about the same as we, sailors, but it was funny at first, couldn't understand each other. But by and by, we got to know each other and we freely understood their lingo. I'd just point to a bottle, for instance, or to a glass—well, quick as a flash he knows it means a drink. Or I'd put my bent palm to my lips and make: pough, pough—he'd be on to it that I want to smoke a pipe. On the whole I can say 'tis an easy language, theirs. Our sailors learned to understand 'em in less than three days.

OMELET

Indeed, I see it's an interesting country. It's splendid to travel in foreign lands. I am pleased to meet a man of your great experience. Permit me to ask, sir, with whom have I the pleasure?

ZHEVAKIN

Zhevakin, sir, retired Lieutenant of the Navy. Permit me also to inquire, with whom have I the happiness to . . .

OMELET

Privy Secretary, Ivan Pavlovitch Omelet.

ZHEVAKIN

[*Not having heard well, misunderstands.*] Yes, I've also had a bite. Was a bit cool—I took a snack, some herring and bread.

OMELET

Pardon me, you've misunderstood. It's my name, Omelet.

ZHEVAKIN

Beg pardon, sir, I'm a little hard of hearing. I really thought that you said you had some omelet for lunch.

OMELET

It's a nuisance, of course. I've been thinking of getting permission to change my name to Omelctson, but my friends tell me it will sound like . . .

ZHEVAKIN

That happens, that happens, sure thing. Our whole third squadron, all the officers and sailors, had the funniest names ever! One was called Swill, an-

other Pusher, and a midshipman we had, and a good midshipman he was, too,—his name was Hole, and the Captain would have his fun with him and call him, "Hey, there, where is that Hole!" Or he would say to him, "Oh, what a Hole you are!"

[*Bell ringing in the corridor.* FYOKLA *hastens across the room to open.*]

OMELET

Ah, good woman, are you here?

ZHEVAKIN

Good morning, little mother!

ANUTCHKIN

Good morning, Fyokla Ivanovna!

FYOKLA

[*Running on.*] Thanks, thanks, my good men, I'm well, thanks!

[*Door is heard opening. Voices: "At home?" "At home." Then several whispers, to which* FYOKLA *replies: "What a man you are!"*]

SCENE XVII

[*Enter* KOTCHKAREV, PODKOLYOSSIN, *and* FYOKLA.]

KOTCHKAREV

[*To* PODKOLYOSSIN]: Just keep your nerve, that's all. [*Looks somewhat surprised at the many peo-*

ple present. To himself:] Hell, what a crowd! What do they all want here, I wonder! All candidates? [*Nudges* FYOKLA, *whispering to her:*] Where did you collect all this riff-raff, eh?

FYOKLA

[*Speaking low.*] How you talk! Riff-raff! All honest men, that's what!

KOTCHKAREV

[*To* FYOKLA.] Guests a-plenty, all down at the heels!

FYOKLA

[*To* KOTCHKAREV.] Yosself a bum: fine feathers and no meal-ticket.

KOTCHKAREV

[*To* FYOKLA.] Your fine guests: pockets full of holes! [*Aloud.*] Well, what is she about, now? This door leads to her chamber, I bet! [*Approaches the door.*]

FYOKLA

You shameless thing! I tell you she's dressing.

KOTCHKAREV

Well, what of it! No harm, I just want to take a peep! [*Looks through the keyhole.*]

ZHEVAKIN

Permit me . . . my curiosity. . . .

OMELET

Give me a look, too.

KOTCHKAREV

[*Remaining at the keyhole.*] There's nothing to be seen, gentlemen. Can't even tell if that white is her or the pillow.

[*All besiege the door and strive to get at the keyhole.*]

KOTCHKAREV

Sh—sh! Someone coming.

[*All withdraw from the door.*]

SCENE XVIII

[*Enter* ARINA *and* AGAFYA. *All bow.*]

ARINA

Gentlemen, to what do we owe this pleasure?

OMELET

Madam, I've seen your advertisement in the papers about your offer to supply lumber, and being in the fuel department of the Civil Service, I have come to inquire the kind of lumber you have, what price and quantity, and when you can deliver the goods.

ARINA

Some mistake: we do not deal in lumber, but we are glad of your visit. What's the name?

OMELET

Privy Secretary, Ivan Pavlovitch Omelet.

ARINA

Please be seated. [*Turning to* ZHEVAKIN.] Permit me to ask . . .

ZHEVAKIN

Me, too . . . I saw the ad in the papers, about something. Thinks I, why not go and take a look? Fine weather, the road all covered with grass. . . .

ARINA

What name?

ZHEVAKIN

Navy Lieutenant, m'am, retired, Baltazar Baltazarovitch Zhevakin II. There was another Zhevakin in our squadron, but he left the service long ago: was wounded, you know, right below the knee, and would you b'lieve it, such a funny wound, the shot never touched the knee bone but just went through the vein, clean as a whistle—but it was funny when you stood near him, it seemed as if he was about to kick you from behind with his knee.

ARINA

Please be seated. [*To* ANUTCHKIN.] To what cause. . . .

ANUTCHKIN

A neighborly visit, madam. I live right here, nearby, that is, not very far. . . .

ARINA

Perhaps in the house of the merchant-widow Tulubova, right opposite here?

ANUTCHKIN

No, at present I still live at the other end of the city, but I've been thinking of becoming your neighbor by moving into these parts. . . .

ARINA

Please be seated. [*To* KOTCHKAREV.] Permit me to inquire. . . .

KOTCHKAREV

Why, don't you really recognize me? [*To* AGAFYA.] And you, Miss?

AGAFYA

Seems to me I have never met you before.

KOTCHKAREV

Just try to remember: you've surely seen me before.

AGAFYA

Really, I don't know. Or perhaps it was at the Birulins'?

KOTCHKAREV

Sure enough, at the Birulins'.

AGAFYA

Oh, do you know the awful thing that happened to her?

KOTCHKAREV

Of course, she got married.

AGAFYA

Well, that would not be so terrible. But she broke her leg.

ARINA

A very serious break, too. She was coming home pretty late one evening, in a cab. The driver must have been drunk: upset the cab.

KOTCHKAREV

Yes, yes, I do remember something happened to her. She got married, or broke her leg, or something.

ARINA

And your name, please?

KOTCHKAREV

Why, Ilya Fomitch Kotchkarev, and we are relatives, at that. My wife is always speaking of. . . . Permit me, ladies. [*Takes* PODKOLYOSSIN *by the hand and introduces him.*] My friend, Podkolyossin, Ivan Kuzmitch, Privy Councillor, an expert in his line.

ARINA

What's the name?

KOTCHKAREV

Podkolyossin, Ivan Kuzmitch, madam, Podkolyossin. His Chief, the Director, is just a figurehead, put there because of his rank. But it's Podkolyossin that attends to the entire management of the department, a fine head.

ARINA

Really? Please be seated.

SCENE XIX

[*Enter* STARIKOV]

STARIKOV

[*Bows quickly and energetically, merchant style, and lightly places his arms akimbo.*]

Good morning, morning, my dear Arina Panteleymovna! The boys at the Inn were telling me that you wanted to sell some wool, little mother.

AGAFYA

[*Turns away in disgust, saying in low voice, but so that he can hear:*] Thinks he's in a store!

STARIKOV

What's the matter, eh? What's wrong? Business settled already, what?

ARINA

Please, Alexey Dmitrovitch, though we don't have any wool to sell, you are welcome, just the same. Please be seated.

[*All are seated. Silence.*]

OMELET

Strange weather we're having these days. Looked like rain this morning, but now seems to clear up a bit.

AGAFYA

Yes, this weather is quite unbearable: sometimes it's clear, and again it's rainy. It's a nuisance.

ZHEVAKIN

In Sicily, ladies, it's different. We were there with our squadron in the spring, or what is spring there: more or less February in our part of the world. Well, I'd go out of the house, and the sun would shine warm as you please. Yes, sir. And

then a bit rainy; that is, if you look sharp, then it seems just like rain.

OMELET

It's most unpleasant to be alone on such a day. For a married man it's an entirely different matter —no lonesomeness for him. But if you are alone— well, it's simply . . .

ZHEVAKIN

Why, it's death; no better than death!

ANUTCHKIN

Y-e-e-s, one may say as much. . . .

KOTCHKAREV

It's the deuce, that's all; purest torture. God save one from such a position.

OMELET

What might be your taste, my dear young lady? Suppose you were to choose and decide. Pardon me for being so straightforward, but, let us say, for example, . . . in what service would you prefer your husband to be?

ZHEVAKIN

Would you prefer, miss, to have your husband familiar with the storms of the sea?

KOTCHKAREV

No, no! In my opinion the best husband is the man who alone manages the whole department.

ANUTCHKIN

Why such preferences? A man is not to be sneezed at who has been in the infantry, but who knows how to appreciate the usages of better society.

OMELET

Dear miss, won't you please tell us your decision?

AGAFYA

[*Remains silent.*]

FYOKLA

Answer them, my dearie; tell 'em something.

OMELET

How, now, young lady?

KOTCHKAREV

What is your opinion, Agafya Tikhonovna?

FYOKLA

[*Whispers to* AGAFYA.] Speak up, dearie. Say, "Thank you," or "With pleasure," or something. It ain't nice to sit so.

AGAFYA

[*Low.*] I'm ashamed, ashamed! I'll go away. Auntie, you sit for me.

FYOKLA

How can you, dear? Don't disgrace yourself by leaving now. They might think something.

AGAFYA

No, I can't stand it! I'll go, I'll go!

[*She runs away.* FYOKLA *and* ARINA *leave after her.*]

SCENE XX

OMELET

Well, I'll be blasted! Now they're all gone! What does it mean?

KOTCHKAREV

Something must have happened.

ZHEVAKIN

I guess something about the lady's toilet. . . . You know, things will happen . . . necessary to pin something or other . . .

[*Enter* FYOKLA. *All besiege her with the question, "What is it? What happened?"*]

KOTCHKAREV

What's the matter? Something gone wrong?

FYOKLA

Nothin' gone wrong! What could go wrong?

KOTCHKAREV

Then why did she leave?

FYOKLA

You've made her ashamed, that's what! Got confused, she did, the poor thing. Begs you to pardon her and invites you for a cup of tea. [*Exit.*]

OMELET

[*Aside.*] How I hate those cups of tea! A nuisance, these ceremonies all are! Today they can't; come tomorrow; and the day after for a cup of tea, and then they must consider the matter. The deuce take it, I haven't the time for all this nonsense. Why, it's a simple matter, but they play for delay and delay. . . . I have duties, I'm a busy man.

KOTCHKAREV

[*To* PODKOLYOSSIN.] Pretty, ain't she?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Not bad-looking.

ZHEVAKIN

Very fetching, the young lady is!

KOTCHKAREV

[*Aside.*] Devil take the old fool—fallen in love, sure. Might spoil everything. [*Aloud.*] No, she is not attractive at all.

OMELET

Her nose's too large.

ZHEVAKIN

Never noticed her nose. But she's peaches and cream.

ANUTCHKIN

Not quite the right one, I guess. I wonder if she is familiar with the customs of higher society! And can she speak French?

ZHEVAKIN

Why didn't you try to speak French with her? Maybe she can.

ANUTCHKIN

You think I can speak French? No, I regret to say, I did not enjoy the opportunity of such a superior education. My father was a scoundrel, a swine. He never even thought of having me learn French. I was a child then and it would have been easy to teach me the language—if they'd just flogged me a few times, I would have surely learned, certainly.

ZHEVAKIN

Well, if you don't know French, what would be the use of her speaking the language?

ANUTCHKIN

Ah, you see, it's different about a woman. Absolutely necessary she should know French. Without it this won't be right, nor the other thing quite, quite, you know . . . [*Illustrates by gesture.*] No, somehow nothing would be quite right.

OMELET

[*Aside.*] Well, let the others worry about this. I'd better go into the yard and have a look at the house and the two wings. If everything is as it ought to be, then it's no use losing time. This very evening I must have the matter settled. And these fellows—why, they don't look very dangerous to me; they have no chance with her.

ZHEVAKIN

Guess I'll go and have a smoke. And you, sir, are you not going in the same direction? Where do you live, if I may ask?

ANUTCHKIN

In the Petrovsky Alley, far away from here.

ZHEVAKIN

Yes, sir, that's quite a way off. Still, I think I shall accompany you.

STARIKOV

No no, there's something rotten here! Well, well, Agafya Tikhonovna, you might think of us one of these days! Good bye, gentlemen! [*Bows and leaves.*]

SCENE XXI

[PODKOLYOSSIN *and* KOTCHKAREV.]

PODKOLYOSSIN

What are we waiting for?

KOTCHKAREV

But the girl is really pretty, ain't she, now?

PODKOLYOSSIN

No, I don't think so at all.

KOTCHKAREV

What! How's that? You've just agreed that she was!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Something not quite right, I say. Nose too large and she don't speak French.

KOTCHKAREV

I never. . . . What the deuce do you want her to talk French for?

PODKOLYOSSIN

After all, the right kind of a bride should know French.

KOTCHKAREV

But why?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Because . . . well, I don't know why, but things won't be quite right without it.

KOTCHKAREV

There you go! Heard some fool say it and you just repeat it like a parrot. She's a beauty, I tell you. Beautiful—and never will you see another such.

PODKOLYOSSIN

At first I did like her myself, but when they started to say—nose too large, long nose—now I see myself that her nose is long.

KOTCHKAREV

You simpleton, you stupid! Don't you see that they just talked like that to scare you off? That's the way I talked to them, too. It's the custom. But I tell you she is a wonderfully beautiful girl. Didn't you notice her eyes? My, what eyes! Why, they

just talk, they breathe! Her nose? Pure alabaster, that's her darling nose! Just perfect! Bethink yourself, man!

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Smiling.*] Now it seems to me again that she is good-looking.

KOTCHKAREV

Of course she is! Now, listen: now that they are all gone, let's step right into her room, explain ourselves and settle the whole thing.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Now? Never would I be guilty of such a thing!

KOTCHKAREV

Why not?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Why, it would be simply unheard-of impudence: there are several of us; let her have her choice.

KOTCHKAREV

Nonsense, man! What do you care about them! Are you afraid of their competition? You know what? I'll get rid of them all in a jiffy!

PODKOLYOSSIN

How can you do that?

KOTCHKAREV

Leave that to me. But promise me that you won't withdraw afterwards.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Why should I withdraw?

KOTCHKAREV

Your word of honor, you won't back out?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Why back out? I want to get married.

KOTCHKAREV

Done! Your hand!

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Gives him his hand.*] Here!

KOTCHKAREV

It's a bet!

[*Both go out.*]

Act Second

SCENE I

[*Room in the house of* Agafya.]

AGAFYA

Ah, it's so hard—to make a choice! If there were one only, or even two—but from a lot of four! How can I choose? Nikanor Ivanovitch is rather pleasing, though he is too slender; Ivan Kuzmitch is also attractive. And to tell the truth, I also like Ivan Pavlovitch—a bit stout, of course, but impressive. Well, then, how can I make my selection? Baltazar Baltazarovitch is rather charming, too. Just impossible to choose! If the mouth of Nikanor Ivanovitch could be placed under the fine nose of Ivan Kuzmitch, and add to it the grace of Baltazar Baltazarovitch, and perhaps also a little of Ivan Pavlovitch's good manners, then it would be easy to make my choice. But as it is—how and whom am I to choose? Why, I've got a headache from thinking about it! I guess it is best to leave it to the Lord's will: I'll draw lots! Whatever name will come out, let him be the husband. I'll write them all on little pieces of paper, roll them up, and then—God's

will be done. [*Approaches the little table, produces paper and a pair of scissors, cuts several pieces and rolls them into little tubes, the while continuing talking:*] A girl has such a difficult position! And particularly if she is in love. Men are not that way, and they can't even understand it. Now, they are all ready. Need only put them into my purse, mix them up, close my eyes, and—let happen what may! [*Puts the pieces of paper into her handbag, and mixes them up.*] I'm afraid! . . . Fearful feeling. Oh, Lord, if only Nikanor Ivanovitch would come out! No, why he? Better Ivan Kuzmitch! But . . . why Ivan Kuzmitch? He's no better than the others. What's the matter with . . . No, no, whichever comes out, him I'll marry. [*Fusses with her hand in the handbag and pulls out all the names instead of one.*] Ough! All of 'em at once! And my heart beats so! No, it must be one, only one. [*Puts the pieces of paper again into the handbag and mixes them. At this moment* KOTCHKAREV *enters very quietly and remains standing behind her.*] Ah, if I could draw Baltazar . . . ah, what's the matter with me—I meant to say Nikanor Ivanovitch. . . . No, no, I didn't mean it. . . . I must let fate decide.

KOTCHKAREV

Take Ivan Kuzmitch—he's the best of them.

AGAFYA

Oh! [*Cries out in fright and covers her face with both hands, afraid to glance behind her.*]

KOTCHKAREV

What are you afraid of?! Don't be frightened: that's only me, Kotchkarev. Really, I advise you —take Ivan Kuzmitch.

AGAFYA

Oh, I'm so ashamed! You've been listening.

KOTCHKAREV

Never mind, never mind, I'm one of the family, a relative. You need not feel ashamed before me. Won't you take your hands from your face, please?

AGAFYA

[*Looking through her spread fingers.*] Really I'm ashamed.

KOTCHKAREV

Better take Ivan Kuzmitch.

AGAFYA

Oh! [*Cries out and again covers her face.*]

KOTCHKAREV

He's a wonder, a fine head! Knows his business to a T. Splendid man!

AGAFYA

[*Gradually withdrawing her hands from her face.*] Yes? But the other also. . . . Nikanor Ivanovitch is also a good man.

KOTCHKAREV

Why, dear, just scum, that's what he is, compared with Ivan Kuzmitch.

AGAFYA

Why so?

KOTCHKAREV

Very simple. Ivan Kuzmitch is a man who . . . a real man, you know, such as you don't find every day.

AGAFYA

And what's the matter with Ivan Pavlovitch?

KOTCHKAREV

Ivan Pavlovitch and all the others, they're all scum, riff-raff, all of 'em!

AGAFYA

As if all of them are . . .

KOTCHKAREV

Every one of them! Why, judge for yourself, just compare them: Ivan Kuzmitch and the others! A man, is Ivan Kuzmitch, as a man should be! And

what are the others? Chaff, rabble! Can you compare them with Ivan Kuzmitch?

AGAFYA

But they seemed to me very nice and modest men.

KOTCHKAREV

How can you talk like that! Nice, modest indeed! Why, can't you see they are ruffians? Do you want to be beaten up the day after your wedding?

AGAFYA

Oh, my God! How terrible!

KOTCHKAREV

Sure it's terrible. Nothing could be worse. I warn you!

AGAFYA

So your advice is to take Ivan Kuzmitch?

KOTCHKAREV

Of course, Ivan Kuzmitch; naturally Ivan Kuzmitch. [*Aside.*] Seems things are going my way. Podkolyossin is waiting in the pastry shop—I'd better go and call him quick.

AGAFYA

You think—Ivan Kuzmitch would really be best?

KOTCHKAREV

Absolutely—Ivan Kuzmitch!

AGAFYA

And those others—should I refuse them?

KOTCHKAREV

Of course—refuse them!

AGAFYA

But how am I to do it? Somehow—it's awkward, I'm ashamed.

KOTCHKAREV

What's there to be ashamed of? Tell 'em you're too young yet: you don't want to marry yet.

AGAFYA

But they will not believe it. They'll begin asking me why and how.

KOTCHKAREV

Well, if you want to settle the matter with one stroke, just tell them simply: "Get out of here, you fools!"

AGAFYA

How can I speak to them like that?

KOTCHKAREV

Just try it. I assure you, they won't remain a minute after that.

AGAFYA

But that would be scolding.

KOTCHKAREV

What do you care? You'll never see them again!

AGAFYA

But it wouldn't sound well—they would get angry!

KOTCHKAREV

What difference does it make? Let 'em be angry. The worst that could happen is that one of them might spit in your eye, that's all.

AGAFYA

Well, you see!

KOTCHKAREV

What of it! No harm done. It often happens. Why, I know the case of a friend of mine—fine-looking man and very impressive, he is! Well, he was anxious to get a raise in his salary and he kept reminding his Chief about it till the latter got tired of it. A man of temperament he was, the Chief. One day, as my friend again asked for a raise, the Chief just jumped from his chair and spat right into his face. Right in the eye, by Gosh! "Here, you idiot," he says, "here's your raise!" But he gave him a raise, after all. So you see, what does it matter if he did spit in his eye? It would be

different, of course, if you couldn't reach a handkerchief; but one is right handy, in your pocket, so you just wipe your face, and that's all! [*Bell rings in the corridor.*] Someone's coming! One of those guys, sure. I don't want to meet 'em now. Isn't there some other exit here?

AGAFYA

Yes, there is: the back stairs. Oh, I'm so excited, I'm afraid

KOTCHKAREV

Just a little courage. Brace up! Everything will be all right. S'long now. [*Aside.*] I'd better fetch Podkolyossin at once.

SCENE II

OMELET

Pardon me, but I have come a little earlier on purpose, because I want to have a talk with you alone. Well, my dear young lady, as concerns my rank, I believe you are informed already that I am a Privy Secretary, have a good position, am liked by my superiors, and everything is in order. . . . Only one thing is lacking—a life-mate.

AGAFYA

Y-e-s.

OMELET

Now I have made my choice—that's you! Tell me plainly, Yes or No? [*Looking at her shoulder. Aside.*] Not like some of those skinny Dutch girls: there's something to her.

AGAFYA

I am very young yet . . . too early to get married.

OMELET

Why, my dear,—how can that be? The matchmaker said— Perhaps you mean something else. Won't you please explain? [*Bell ringing.*] The deuce take it! Won't give me a chance to attend to business!

SCENE III

ZHEVAKIN

Pardon me, madam, perhaps I'm a bit early. [*Turning around, notices* OMELET.] Ah, someone's here already. . . . My respects, Ivan Pavlovitch!

OMELET

[*Aside.*] To the devil with your respects! [*Aloud.*] What is your answer, miss? Just say one word, Yes or No? . . . [*The bell.* OMELET *expectorates passionately.*] Again that damned bell!

SCENE IV

ANUTCHKIN

My dear young lady, maybe I am a little early . . . [*Noticing the others, makes an exclamation of surprise and bows.*] My respects, gentlemen!

OMELET

[*Aside.*] Who wants his respects, the fool! Wish he'd broken his neck on his way here. [*Aloud.*] What, then, is your decision, madam? I have my duties, you know, and my time is limited. Is it Yes or No?

AGAFYA

[*Confused.*] Not necessary, not necessary . . . [*Aside.*] I don't know what I am saying.

OMELET

How, not necessary? What does it mean, "Not necessary?"

AGAFYA

No . . . nothing . . . I mean . . . [*With sudden courage.*] Get out of here! [*Frightened.*] Oh, my God! What did I say!

OMELET

How, "Get out of here!" What d'you mean, "Get out of here"? Please explain what you mean. [*Arms akimbo, he approaches her threateningly.*]

AGAFYA

[*Frightened by his anger.*] Oh, oh! He'll beat me up! [*Rushes out in a panic.* OMELET *remains standing in astonishment, mouth open.* ARINA *hastens in, alarmed by* AGAFYA'S *cries. Glancing at* OMELET'S *enraged appearance, she is terrorized. Cries out, "He'll beat me up!" and rushes out again.*]

OMELET

What does it all mean? What a mess! [*Bell rings and voices are heard in the corridor.*]

KOTCHKAREV'S VOICE

Well, come in, come, what are you standing in the door for?

PODKOLYOSSIN'S VOICE

You go in first. Just a minute—got to fix my suspenders.

KOTCHKAREV'S VOICE

Don't you sneak out again!

PODKOLYOSSIN'S VOICE

No, no, I won't sneak out, I swear it!

SCENE V

KOTCHKAREV

Never mind your suspenders—you'll fix them later.

OMELET

[*To* KOTCKAREV.] Tell me, please, is the bride crazy, or what?

KOTCHKAREV

Why, what's happened?

OMELET

Her behavior is most strange: she ran out, began shouting, "He'll beat me up, beat me up!" just like a mad one. What's wrong with her?

KOTCHKAREV

Well, you see—she is subject to such fits—occasionally.

OMELET

You are related to her, aren't you?

KOTCHKAREV

Yes, a relative.

OMELET

May I ask what kind of a relation?

KOTCHKAREV

Really, I don't know. My mother's aunt is some relation of her father, or may be it's her father somehow connected with my aunt. My wife knows more about it—it's her business.

OMELET

Has she long been subject to these fits?

KOTCHKAREV

Since childhood.

OMELET

Too bad! Still, it wouldn't matter so much, if the promised dowry is all right.

KOTCHKAREV

Her dowry? Why, she hasn't a thing!

OMELET

How so? And the brown-stone house?

KOTCHKAREV

Some brown-stone! That's all talk, man! You know how it's built, that grand house? Nothing but old brick and just filled with all kinds of dirt and refuse.

OMELET

Really?

KOTCHKAREV

Of course! Don't you know how houses are built nowadays? Just to look so they can be mortgaged.

OMELET

But there is no mortgage on it, is there?

KOTCHKAREV

Is there? It's not only mortgaged, but even the interest hasn't been paid for two years. And her brother, the worst kind of a scamp, is having his eye on the house, at that! A scoundrel,—he'd rob his own mother of her last petticoat.

OMELET

But that old Fyokla—why, she swore that— Ah, the old hag! [*Aside.*] Maybe he's lying, though! Must see the old woman at once. I'll grill her so, I'll roast the truth out of her.

ANUTCHKIN

Permit me to trouble you with a question, sir. I confess, not being familiar with the French language, I cannot judge whether the young lady speaks French well. Will you be good enough to inform me, does she know French?

KOTCHKAREV

Not a word.

ANUTCHKIN

Really? You're sure?

KOTCHKAREV

I should say so! Why, she went to school together with my wife, and she had the worst reputa-

tion for laziness. Was just stupid. The French teacher used to beat her with a cane.

ANUTCHKIN

Just think of it, from the very first minute I had the feeling that she did not know French.

OMELET

Oh, to hell with French! But that cursed old hag of a Fyokla—such a brazen liar—If you only knew how she pictured this business to me! A reg'lar painter, I tell you, an artist! "Fine house," she said, "two wings on foundations, silver spoons, carriage and sleigh." It's all ready—just get in and drive off! Like a page out of a romance! Just let me catch that old witch—I'll . . .

SCENE VI

[*Enter* FYOKLA. *All address her at once.*]

OMELET

There she is! Just come here, you old sinner; come on here!

ANUTCHKIN

That's how you deceived me, Fyokla Ivanovna!

KOTCHKAREV

Face your judgment day, now!

FYOKLA

Nary a word can I understand—you deafen me!

OMELET

The house is just of old brick, you lying beast; and built of dirt!

FYOKLA

What do I know! Did I build it, what? Maybe that's the way it had to be built, that's what!

OMELET

And mortgaged, too! You cursed old hag! [*Stamps his foot.*]

FYOKLA

Just look at 'im! The ingrate! You ought to thank me for taking all that trouble for you.

ANUTCHKIN

But, Fyokla Ivanovna, you assured me she speaks French.

FYOKLA

Indeed, she does! And German and everything else. And her manners—like a grand lady, that's what.

ANUTCHKIN

No, it seems to me she can speak Russian only.

FYOKLA

D'ye see any harm in that? You understand Russian better, so she speaks Russian, nat'chrally. And if she talked Chinese, would be so much the worse for you—you wouldn't understand. No, no, don't be kicking and fussing—Russian is good enough—all our saints spoke in that language.

OMELET

You just come here, you hag, just come nearer.

FYOKLA

[*Backing toward the door.*] No, that I won't! I know you—you're a bad one, you'd beat me up.

OMELET

Look out, you'd better look out! I'll get the police after you! They'll show you how to deceive honest people. Just wait and see! And you tell the bride she's an idiot! Don't you forget it! [*Exit.*]

FYOKLA

How he carries on! The fat-belly! Because he's so big, thinks there's no one like 'im! And I tell you, you are yousself an idiot! And a scoundrel, too!

ANUTCHKIN

I admit, dear woman, I wouldn't have believed that you would have deceived me like that. If I had known

before that the bride lacks education, you'd never seen me inside this door. Believe me! [*Exit.*]

FYOKLA

What talk! Must have had a drop too much. And how perticler they are! Choosers, ain't they! Fool edjication's taken all their good sense away, that's what!

SCENE VII

KOTCHKAREV

[*Looks at* FYOKLA *and laughs uproariously, and points his finger at her.*]

FYOKLA

[*Irritated.*] What are you guffawing about?

KOTCHKAREV

[*Continues to laugh loudly.*]

FYOKLA

What's tickling you, eh?

KOTCHKAREV

What a master you are at your business!!! Ha, ha, ha! Ain't you! Knows how to marry people!!! Ha, ha, ha!!!!

FYOKLA

You big horse-laugh! Stupid! Sure your mother went daft when she gave birth to you. [*Leaves in high rage.*]

SCENE VIII

KOTCHKAREV

[*Continuing to laugh.*] Oh, I can't any more, really I'll burst laughing. [*Continues to roar.*]

ZHEVAKIN

[*Looking at him, also begins to laugh.*]

KOTCHKAREV

[*Exhausted by his laughter, falls into a chair.*] I can't, I can't! If I keep on, I'll burst a vessel, sure!

ZHEVAKIN

I like your jolly disposition. In our squadron we had a midshipman—Rooster, his name was; Anton Ivanovitch Rooster. Jolly as can be, just like yourself. Sometimes you'd just have to point a finger at him—one finger—and he'd start. Laughing? Why, he'd just burst laughing, all day long, way into the evening. Just that one finger, you know. And looking at him, you'd yourself begin laughing, couldn't help it, really you couldn't.

KOTCHKAREV

[*Catching his breath.*] Oh, Lord, I really can't laugh any more! But just think of that old fool! As if she could marry anyone! The idea of her marrying anyone! Too funny for words! If I'd undertake it, I'd marry them all right, all right.

ZHEVAKIN

Really? You know how to do it?

KOTCHKAREV

Do I? Can marry anyone to anyone.

ZHEVAKIN

If you can really do it, then marry me to this young lady here.

KOTCHKAREV

Marry you? What do you want to get married for?

ZHEVAKIN

How, what do I want to get married for! Peculiar question, rather. Want to get married, naturally.

KOTCHKAREV

Didn't you hear that she has no dowry?

ZHEVAKIN

Well, that can't be helped. It's bad, of course, but—after all, one can get along with such a nice

girl even without a dowry. And her fine manners, too. A little room [*illustrates with his hands*], don't need to be very large, here a pretty curtain, or better perhaps, a screen or something . . .

KOTCHKAREV

But what is it that pleased you so in her? Has she taken your fancy?

ZHEVAKIN

Truth to tell, I like her for her full figure. I'm crazy about them when they're plump.

KOTCHKAREV

[*Examining him with a side glance, speaks aside.*] Skinny as a stick himself, like a squeezed lemon. [*Aloud.*] No, my friend, you ought not to get married.

ZHEVAKIN

Why so?

KOTCHKAREV

Naturally. Now, look at yourself! What kind of a figure have you? Between ourselves, legs like spindles . . .

ZHEVAKIN

What—d'you mean, spindles!

KOTCHKAREV

Sure, spindles! *Some* figure, you have!

ZHEVAKIN

Seems to me, it's getting personal, so to speak . . .

KOTCHKAREV

I am talking to you as to a sensible man. Do you think I'd say such a thing to any one else? But you are a reasonable person. Well, listen to me: I'll marry you, but to another woman.

ZHEVAKIN

No, thank you, I don't want to marry another woman. Be good enough to marry me to this one.

KOTCHKAREV

If you insist, I'll do it, friend. But on one condition: you mustn't interfere with me whatever I do, and you shouldn't even see the girl till I've arranged everything. I'll manage without you.

ZHEVAKIN

But how without me? I must see her now and then at least.

KOTCHKAREV

No, it's not necessary at all. You just go home and wait: by this very evening I'll have the matter settled.

ZHEVAKIN

[*Rubs his hands in glee.*] That *would* be fine! But don't you need some paper, my credentials as

a former lieutenant of the Imperial Navy? The bride might be curious and want to take a look at them. I can run over home and get them in a minute.

KOTCHKAREV

Don't need them. Just go home—I'll let you know this evening. [*Sees him to the door.*] Curse it all, where's Podkolyossin? What's detaining him? Is he still fixing his suspenders, I wonder! Hadn't I better go look for him?

SCENE IX

AGAFYA

[*Cautiously entering.*] Are they gone? All gone?

KOTCHKAREV

Come in, come in, they're all gone.

AGAFYA

You don't know how scared I was, how I trembled! I have never before lived through anything like it. And that man Omelet, how terrible he is! It would be awful to have such a tyrant for a husband. I am still fearful he might come back any moment.

KOTCHKAREV

Be easy on that point. No danger of him returning. I'd wager anything, not a single one will ever come back.

AGAFYA

And the third one?

KOTCHKAREV

What third one?

ZHEVAKIN

[*Putting his head through the door.*] I'd give anything to see how her little rosebud of a mouth will look when she'll be talking about me . . . such a sweet one . . .

AGAFYA

Ah, Baltazar Baltazarovitch?

ZHEVAKIN

Himself, at your service, madam! [*Rubs his hands.*]

KOTCHKAREV

Why, curse it, this fellow is the stupidest scarecrow ever!

ZHEVAKIN

What's that? I can't understand . . .

AGAFYA

But he looked pretty decent.

KOTCHKAREV

A drunkard!

ZHEVAKIN

By God, I don't understand this!

AGAFYA

Truly, a drunkard?

KOTCHKAREV

A known scoundrel.

ZHEVAKIN

Well, now, lookee here! [*Loud.*] Beg pardon, but I've surely never asked you to say such things about me. Something in my favor, a little boost—that's natural. But what does it mean—to speak like that. . . . No, thank you. . . . I won't have it.

KOTCHKAREV

[*Aside.*] What evil wind brought him back? [*To* AGAFYA, *in a whisper.*] Look, he can hardly stand on his feet! That's the way with him. Tell him to go, and finished! [*Aside.*] Where the deuce is Podkolyossin? The scoundrel! I'll fix him, all right! [*Exit.*]

SCENE X

ZHEVAKIN

[*Aside.*] Promised to boost me, but what does he do but. . . . Strange fellow! [*Aloud.*] My dear Miss, don't you believe . . .

AGAFYA

Excuse me, but I'm not feeling well . . . headache . . . [*About to leave.*]

ZHEVAKIN

Maybe there's something about me you don't like? [*Pointing at his head.*] Don't mind that I am somewhat bald there—it's nothing, just from a fever. The hair will soon grow there again.

AGAFYA

I don't care . . .

ZHEVAKIN

Why, Miss, when I put on a black waistcoat . . . I won't look so florid in the face . . .

AGAFYA

The better for you. Good bye! [*Exit.*]

SCENE XI

[ZHEVAKIN *alone, talking as if* AGAFYA *were still there.*] Just tell me the reason, Miss, explain why and how? Is there anything wrong about me? Something fundamentally lacking? . . . There! She's gone! How peculiar! It's the seventeenth time this has happened to me, and almost every time the same way: at first everything seems to be going well, but

when it reaches the critical point,—nothing doing! [*Paces the room absorbed in thought.*] Yes, sir, that's the seventeenth bride. And what does she really think? What is it she wants? Simply says No, and no explanation! [*In thought.*] Strange, very strange! If I were a cripple or something, a hunchback, perhaps . . . [*Regards himself.*] Seems I am all right, nothing wrong with me. Nature hasn't been a stepmother to me, thank God! Simply inconceivable! Maybe . . . perhaps I'd better go home and look in my trunk—I had some little poetry there, sweet rimes . . . no woman could withstand them. . . . Inconceivable! At first all was favorable to me. . . . There's nothing left to do but turn about . . . Too bad! Too bad! [*Exit.*]

SCENE XII

[*Enter* PODKOLYOSSIN *and* KOTCHKAREV, *repeatedly glancing backward.*]

KOTCHKAREV

He didn't notice us. Did you see his face as he left?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Did she really refuse him like the others?

KOTCHKAREV

Absolutely.

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*With a smile of self-satisfaction.*] Must be awkward when one is refused.

KOTCHKAREV

I should think so!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Somehow I cannot yet believe that she will say outright that she prefers me to the others.

KOTCHKAREV

Prefer! Why, man, she's just crazy about you! What affectionate names she's been calling you. I tell you, she's conceived a powerful passion for vou —she's terribly in love.

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Smiles contentedly.*] It's true, you know, what cute words a woman can find when she wants to! A man would never think of such names as "dovie mine," or "honeybug," "piggie." Oh!

KOTCHKAREV

That's nothing! Wait till you're married and then you'll hear such words—'twill make your heart melt.

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*With a smirk.*] You don't say so!

KOTCHKAREV

You innocent, you! But look here, now, it's time to get down to business. Go, now, tell her, open your heart to her and demand her hand.

PODKOLYOSSIN

So suddenly?

KOTCHKAREV

You go right now!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Now? Why, man . . .

KOTCHKAREV

This very minute. But here she is herself!

SCENE XIII

KOTCHKAREV

I am bringing to you, my dear young lady, a mortal whom you behold now. Never was there any man so deeply in love, the Lord be my witness!

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Nudging him and whispering.*] You're putting it on too thick.

KOTCHKAREV

[*To him.*] Never you mind! [*To her, low.*] He's very timid. You must encourage him, you know.

Just let yourself go, a bit; raising the eyebrows is good, or suddenly dropping your eyes out of feminine modesty, and then—a bit of shoulder helps, you know—let the innocent admire it! But it's too bad you've not put on that dress with the short sleeves! Oh, well, this will do. [*Aloud.*] Well, I'm going to leave you in interesting company! I shall just look in for a moment in the dining room and the kitchen: a few things to be arranged yet, the last touches, you know—the caterer will be here presently, from whom the supper has been ordered. And the wine has already arrived, I suppose. . . . Well, I must be off. . . . So long! [*To* PODKOLYOSSIN.] Courage, old man, courage! [*Exit.*]

SCENE XIV

AGAFYA

Please, be seated.

[*They sit down. Silence.*]

PODKOLYOSSIN

You like to row?

AGAFYA

What did you say, row?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Yes; in the summer-time, in the country, it is nice to go out rowing.

AGAFYA

Yes, we sometimes go out with friends.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Hard to say what kind of a summer we are going to have.

AGAFYA

Very desirable to have nice weather.

[*Both are silent.*]

PODKOLYOSSIN

What flowers do you prefer?

AGAFYA

Those that have the strongest odor—carnations.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Ladies love flowers.

AGAFYA

Yes, very. [*Silence.*] To what church did you go last Sunday?

PODKOLYOSSIN

In the Voznessensk. The previous week I went to the Kazan Cathedral. But, after all, it is just the same in what church we glorify the good Lord. Some are more decorated, that's all. [*Silence.* PODKOLYOSSIN *drums with his fingers on the table.*] Soon we are going to have the Ekaterinhof festival.

AGAFYA

Yes, within a month, I think.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Less than a month now.

AGAFYA

It will be a very jolly time.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Today is the eighth; [*counts on his fingers*] the ninth, tenth, eleventh . . . just twenty-two days yet.

AGAFYA

So soon?

PODKOLYOSSIN

I am not counting today. [*Silence.*] What courage our people have!

AGAFYA

Why?

PODKOLYOSSIN

The workingmen. They stand on the very top. . . . As I was coming here, I saw a man, high, high up, and he didn't seem at all afraid.

AGAFYA

Yes? Where was it?

PODKOLYOSSIN

It's on the way to my Department. I go, of course, every day to my Department. [*Silence.* PODKOLYOSSIN *again drums on the table, and finally picks up his hat and begins to bow.*]

AGAFYA

You are not going already?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Yes. . . . Pardon me if I've bored you . . .

AGAFYA

How can you? On the contrary, I want to thank you for the interesting time . . .

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Smiling.*] I was afraid I was boring you.

AGAFYA

Oh, no, not at all!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, then, maybe you will permit me to call again, some evening . . .

AGAFYA

With pleasure.

[*They bow and shake hands.* PODKOLYOSSIN *leaves.*]

SCENE XV

[AGAFYA *alone.*]

What a nice man! Only now I have gotten to know him well; really, one could not help loving him: he's so modest and sensible. Indeed, his friend was right in what he said about him—I'm only sorry he went away so soon—it's too bad. I'd love to talk with him a little more—it's such a pleasure to listen to his conversation. And what's more—no hot air about him: his words have meaning, and every one counts. Very interesting man. I also would have liked to say a few words to him—but, I confess, I lost my courage, my heart beat so. . . . Splendid man! I must go and tell Auntie. [*Exit.*]

SCENE XVI

[*Enter* PODKOLYOSSIN *and* KOTCHKAREV.]

KOTCHKAREV

Going home? What nonsense! What are you going home for?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Why should I remain here? I've said to her everything that was necessary already.

KOTCHKAREV

Then you've declared your love?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, not exactly. That I didn't yet.

KOTCHKAREV

What the deuce! Why didn't you?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, you don't expect me to do it just like that . . . all of a sudden . . . without having talked of other things, just to blurt out: "Madam, I want to marry you!"

KOTCHKAREV

Then what stupidities have you been telling her all this half hour?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Oh, we discussed many things, and I must say I am quite satisfied: it was very interesting.

KOTCHKAREV

But look here, man: there is no time to lose; within an hour we must be in the church, for the wedding.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Are you crazy? Today? . . . Get married today?

KOTCHKAREV

Of course today.

PODKOLYOSSIN

To be married today?

KOTCHKAREV

You've solemnly promised that you will be ready to marry as soon as we get rid of the other men.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, I'm not going back on my word, but why marry today? I want at least a month's time.

KOTCHKAREV

You don't seem in your right mind, you stupid! A month!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Not a day less than a month!

KOTCHKAREV

Just gone crazy, that's all!

PODKOLYOSSIN

I can't in less than a month.

KOTCHKAREV

But, you idiot, I've ordered supper for tonight! Now, listen, Ivan Kuzmitch, don't be stubborn, marrying at once!

PODKOLYOSSIN

My God, how can I at once?

KOTCHKAREV

I beg of you, Ivan Kuzmitch. Do me the favor, won't you?!

PODKOLYOSSIN

I really can't, I can't!

KOTCHKAREV

You can, you can, my friend! Please, now, do it!

PODKOLYOSSIN

But how can I? It's so awkward!

KOTCHKAREV

What, awkward! Nonsense! Who told you such a thing! The idea—awkward! Why, look here, man, you are a sensible fellow, and you know I'm doing it for your own good. I am your friend, ain't I? Well, then, just do as I tell you. I'm talking to you like a father. . . . Well, enough now, don't hesitate any more. A little courage, my boy. Decide to do it now, there's a good boy!

PODKOLYOSSIN

If it could be done, I might . . .

KOTCHKAREV

Of course, it can! Now, my dear friend, please, please, I beg you. . . . I'll beg you on my knees!

PODKOLYOSSIN

You confuse me . . .

KOTCHKAREV

[*On his bended knee.*] Look at me, man,—I beg you—see, I am on my knees before you. Do me the favor, Ivan Kuzmitch. . . . All my life long I'll be grateful to you for it. Don't be stubborn, dear, dear friend!

PODKOLYOSSIN

No, I can't, I can't!

KOTCHKAREV

[*Getting up.*] You swine!

PODKOLYOSSIN

There you go cursing again!

KOTCHKAREV

You idiot, scoundrel you! Never saw such a lout before in my life!

PODKOLYOSSIN

How you talk!

KOTCHKAREV

That's how you appreciate all my efforts! Why, I've been working for you like a beaver, you pig that you are! Am I doing it for my benefit or for yours, what? You're a fool, a natural-born fool,

that's all! I wash my hands of the whole business, and you can go . . .

PODKOLYOSSIN

Who asked you to do it, anyhow? I'm sure I didn't.

KOTCHKAREV

You'd be lost without me, man! Could you get married without me? You know you can't! If I don't marry you off, you'll remain a fool for the rest of your life!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Never mind that!

KOTCHKAREV

I've been trying my best for you, you blockhead!

PODKOLYOSSIN

I don't need your trying for me!

KOTCHKAREV

Then you can go to the devil!

PODKOLYOSSIN

I'll go where I please!

KOTCHKAREV

To the devil you'll go! That's where you belong! And I hope you'll break your leg on the way. May

some drunken driver run over your fool neck! An official, Privy Councillor! An old woman you are, a rag, that's what *you* are! Go, you chump! I'll never have anything more to do with you! Never want to see you again, you ninny, mutton-head you!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Don't need to see me! [*Exit.*]

KOTCHKAREV

[*Shouts at him as he is leaving.*] To the devil, go straight to him. Idiot!

SCENE XVII

[KOTCHKAREV, *alone, paces the room in great excitement.*]

Such a blockhead! Was there ever another like it in the world before? A downright fool! And I myself am not much better, either! What's the use trying for a fool like that! I've been working my finger-nails off for him, and what for? I'm stupid myself! What is it to me, anyhow? A brother, a son, or what! Just nothing! It's none of my business, and here I've been slaving for him and talking my head off! Why should I care? Why worry myself sick for that fool? Don't know myself what's possessed me! Ask a man why he is doing this or that! Who can tell! He can't tell himself! And for

such a simpleton, at that! Such a disgusting fellow with that ugly mug of his! The scoundrel! I'd just like to punch his face, the boob! Right between his eyes, the nincompoop! [*In a rage punches into the air.*] On the nose, on the jaw! That's the way! Take that, you pieface, and that! And to think how coolly he took it! Just walked out as if the whole thing didn't concern him! Like water off a duck! Now he'll go to his room and he'd be lying there on his divan and smoke his pipe as if nothing happened! It's maddening! But no, I won't let him, by gosh, I won't! I'll just go right to the scoundrel! I won't let him slip away like that! I'll go and fetch back the blamed idiot! [*Runs out.*]

SCENE XVIII

[*Enter* AGAFYA TIKHONOVNA.]

AGAFYA

My heart's beating so. . . . I can't even understand it—wherever I look, I seem to see Ivan Kuzmitch. It is true indeed: there's no getting away from your fate. I tried to think of something else, but whatever I did, it was always *him* standing before me. When I am sewing or embroidering or threading a needle—I see Ivan Kuzmitch between me and my work! [*She remains silent for a while.*] So I am to change my single state for. . . . They'll

lead me to church . . . then they'll leave me alone with a man. . . . Oh! . . . I'm trembling at the very thought. . . . Goodbye, my maidenhood. . . . [*Crying quietly.*] So many years I've lived quietly. . . . Lived and lived, and now I have to get married! There will be so much to worry about: children, boys no doubt, a rough crowd, and then girls will come and they'll soon grow up, and I'll have to get them married. If they'd only get decent husbands—but they might get some drunkards or such that are always ready to stake their last rouble at cards. Terrible. [*Begins to weep again.*] I didn't have time to enjoy much my innocent youth—hardly twenty-seven years I've been a virgin . . . [*Changing her tone.*] But where is Ivan Kuzmitch —what's keeping him so long?

SCENE XIX

[AGAFYA *and* PODKOLYOSSIN. *The latter is being pushed out onto the stage by* KOTCHKAREV *using both his hands.*]

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Hesitatingly.*] I came, madam—to explain—a little matter to you—but I'd like to ask first—wouldn't it seem strange to you?

AGAFYA

[*Modestly lowering her eyes.*] What is it?

PODKOLYOSSIN

No, madam, you—must tell me first if you will not think it strange.

AGAFYA

[*As before.*] But I don't know what it is.

PODKOLYOSSIN

But admit, what I am going to say to you may seem queer to you?

AGAFYA

Pardon me, that can hardly be. It will be a pleasure to have you tell me something.

PODKOLYOSSIN

But it is something you have never heard before. [AGAFYA *still more lowers her eyes. At this moment enters* KOTCHKAREV *and walking on tiptoe remains behind* PODKOLYOSSIN.] It is this. . . . But maybe I'd better tell you some other time.

AGAFYA

But what is it?

PODKOLYOSSIN

It is. . . . I'd like to tell you now about it, but . . . I have some doubts . . .

KOTCHKAREV

[*To himself.*] My God, what a man! Not a man —just an old rag, a worn-out lady's shoe—a satire upon man, a caricature!

AGAFYA

But why do you have doubts?

PODKOLYOSSIN

Somehow I am not sure . . .

KOTCHKAREV

[*Aloud.*] Stupid nonsense, that's what it is! You see, madam, he's asking for your hand, he wants to tell you that he cannot live without you, that life would be a miserable torture if you will not marry him. He desires your reply, will you make him happy for the rest of his life?

PODKOLYOSSIN

[*Frightened, pushes* KOTCHKAREV *aside, saying excitedly.*] Why, what's the matter with you?

KOTCHKAREV

Well, then, dear young lady, are you willing to make him happy?

AGAFYA

I dare not think I could give happiness . . . but I consent.

KOTCHKAREV

Of course, of course! Fine, splendid! Should have said so long ago! Here, your hands!

PODKOLYOSSIN

A moment! [*He wants to whisper something in* KOTCHKAREV'S *ear, but the latter threatens him with his fist, looking fiercely at him.* PODKOLYOSSIN *holds out his hand.*]

KOTCHKAREV

[*Placing their hands together.*] God's blessings upon you! I give you my consent and I approve of your union. Marriage is a serious matter. . . . It is not to be taken lightly, not to be taken . . . as you take a cab, for instance, for a short ride. No, it is a different matter, a duty, so to speak, an obligation. . . . But just now I haven't the time to enlarge upon it. Later I will tell you more. . . . Well, Ivan Kuzmitch, kiss your bride. You may do it now; it's your duty to do it now. [AGAFYA *lowers her eyes.*] That's all right, Agafya Tikhonovna; it is customary, let him kiss you now!

PODKOLYOSSIN

Permit me, madam, now you must permit me! [*Kisses her and takes her hand.*] What a pretty hand! How is it you have such a pretty hand? . . . Now, then, I want the wedding to take place at once.

AGAFYA

At once? Right now? Why, that is a little too soon.

PODKOLYOSSIN

Too soon, nothing! The wedding must be immediately: can't be too soon for me!

KOTCHKAREV

Bravo! Fine! A gentleman, a man of honor! I confess, I've always expected you to do the right thing. Agafya Tikhonovna, you must hurry now, dress quickly, for I must inform you that I have already ordered the carriage and invited the wedding guests. They're all gone to the church now. I know you have your wedding gown ready, haven't you?

AGAFYA

Surely, it's ready long ago. I'll be dressed in a minute.

SCENE XX

[KOTCHKAREV *and* PODKOLYOSSIN]

PODKOLYOSSIN

Well, my friend, thanks, thanks! I see now what you have done for me. I thank you, old boy! My own father could not have done more. You're a real friend—I'll never forget it—[*Deeply moved.*]

Next spring I'm going to bring flowers to your father's grave, sure!

KOTCHKAREV

It's all right, my boy. I am very happy it's ended so well. Come, I'll kiss you. [*Kisses him on one cheek, then on the other.*] May God give you happiness. [*They kiss again.*] May you live in peace and contentment, and raise a multitude of offspring. . . .

PODKOLYOSSIN

Thanks, thanks! It's only now that I realise what life is! It's like an entirely new world! Now I see how everything lives, moves, feels, yes, feels, that's the main thing, f-e-e-l-s,—I don't know how to explain it, but—feels, yes, siree! I didn't understand a thing of it before—I was like a man without any comprehension at all, I did not consider matters; did not get down to rock bottom, just lived like some ordinary man. . . .

KOTCHKAREV

I'm awfully glad, awfully glad! I must run off now to see that everything is in order. I'll be back in a minute. [*Aside.*] But I'd better take no chances: it's safer to take his hat with me. [*Exit with* PODKOLYOSSIN'S *hat.*]

SCENE XXI

[PODKOLYOSSIN *alone*]

Really, now, what kind of a man was I before? Did I know anything of life? Not a thing, just as if I were deaf and dumb, and blind, too. A bachelor, that's all! A life without meaning, with no sense in it. I slept, I ate, I went to my office—in short, an empty, insignificant life! A commonplace, ordinary man! Only now I see how stupid are those that don't marry. And to think, how many thousands, millions of them are like that! Why, the majority, you might say. Living in darkness and blindness. If I were King of some land, I wouldn't permit a single bachelor! To think of it—in a few minutes I'll be a married man! All at once I'll taste of the bliss that one reads only in romances—a bliss that I could not even find words to describe. One must feel it. . . . [*After a short silence.*] But, you may say what you will—it is a bit disconcerting, when you consider it thoughtfully. To bind oneself for an entire lifetime—however you look at it, it's a long time, and no more excuses, no regrets of any use—it's all finished, all done! Even now I could not change matters, couldn't back out any more: in a few minutes I'm to be in the church, the wedding is to be performed—the carriage stands ready, everything waiting. . . . But could I really . . .

Couldn't I get away? Of course, I couldn't: there are people all about; they will ask, "What is it? Where are you going?" No, no, it's impossible! But—here the window is open. . . . How would it be . . . No, I can't! It would be indecent, and it's too high! [*Approaching the window.*] No, it's not so very high, it's rather low. But I haven't my hat! I can't without a hat—it'll look funny, even suspicious. But must I have my hat, after all? What if I were to try? Shall I? Attempt it? [*He climbs upon the sill of the window and saying, "The Lord help me!" jumps off into the street. His voice is heard: "Oh, pretty high, though! Hey, cabman, here!"*

CABMAN'S VOICE

Where to, sir?

PODKOLYOSSIN'S VOICE

To the Semenovsky Bridge!

CABMAN'S VOICE

It'll cost you a quarter, sir!

PODKOLYOSSIN'S VOICE

All right. Quick!

[*The sound of a cab, gradually dying away.*]

SCENE XXII

[AGAFYA *enters, dressed for the wedding, in white veil, etc., walks slowly, head somewhat lowered.*]

AGAFYA

Such a strange feeling. . . . I don't know myself what it is. . . . I feel ashamed; I'm all aquiver. Oh, I wish he were not here in the room, just for a moment! If he had only gone out for a minute somewhere! [*Timidly looks about her.*] Why, where is he? There's no one here! Where could he have gone? [*She opens the door leading into the corridor and calls:*] Fyokla, where did Ivan Kuzmitch go to?

VOICE OF FYOKLA

Why, he's there!

AGAFYA

Where, there?

FYOKLA

[*Entering.*] He was here a minute ago, sitting in the room here.

AGAFYA

Don't you see that he is not here?

FYOKLA

But he didn't leave the room, I'm sure. I was in the corridor all the time.

AGAFYA

Where is he, then?

FYOKLA

Don't know—maybe he went by the back entrance, or wait! Perhaps he's sitting in Arina Panteleymovna's room!

AGAFYA

Auntie, oh, auntie!

SCENE XXIII

ARINA

[*Enters half-dressed.*] What is it, dear?

AGAFYA

Is Ivan Kuzmitch in your room?

ARINA

No, he is here. He wasn't in my room.

FYOKLA

He ain't in the corridor, either.

AGAFYA

But you can see he isn't here!

SCENE XXIV

KOTCHKAREV

[*Entering.*] What is it?

AGAFYA

Ivan Kuzmitch isn't here!

KOTCHKAREV

How, not here? Gone away?

AGAFYA

Not gone away, either!

KOTCHKAREV

Not here, and not gone away—what then?

FYOKLA

I can't understand it misself! Not here and not gone out! Not through the corridor, anyhow.

ARINA

He couldn't have gone by the back exit. Impossible!

KOTCHKAREV

But that's nonsense! He couldn't disappear like that without leaving this room! Maybe he's hidden himself somewhere? Ivan Kuzmitch! Where are you? Don't play the fool, now! Come on out of

there! Stupid joke! It's time to go to church! [*Looks behind the wardrobe, and casts a glance beneath the chairs even.*] Can't understand it! It can't be! He couldn't have left, he couldn't! May be in that other room? His hat is there, too—I purposely put it there.

ARINA

Maybe we'd better ask the maid—she's been on the street all this time—maybe she knows something. . . . Dunyashka! Dunyashka!

SCENE XXV

[*Enter* DUNYASHKA]

ARINA

Where is Ivan Kuzmitch? Have you seen him?

DUNYASHKA

He's jumped out of th' window.

AGAFYA

[*Emits a shrill cry.*]

ALL THREE

Through the window?

DUNYASHKA

Yes, sir. And after he'd jumped out, he called a cab and went away.

ARINA

Are you telling the truth?

KOTCHKAREV

She's lying! It's impossible!

DUNYASHKA

S'help me! He's jumped out! The grocery man also saw it. The cabman asked a quarter and then drove off.

ARINA

[*Coming up close to* KOTCHKAREV.] What does it mean, Sir? Were you just poking fun at us? It's disgraceful! I am sixty years old, the Lord be thanked, but never, never have I been subjected to such a shameful thing! For this I'll spit in your face, if you are a decent man! If you are a decent man and do such a thing, then you are a scoundrel, I tell you! To disgrace a young girl before the whole world! I am a peasant woman, but never would I do such a low thing, and you a nobleman at that! Just for meanness you have enough nobility! [*Leaves in a rage, leading the bride with her.* KOTCHKAREV *stands overwhelmed.*]

FYOKLA

You! You know how to marry people, eh? Without me you can do the business, huh! Without me, eh? Why, I've had all kinds of bridegrooms for girls, good ones and bad ones, and raggedy ones, but such that jump out of the window I never had! No, sirree! Save me from such, that's what!

KOTCHKAREV

That's all nonsense! It can't be! I'll run after him and bring him back. [*Exit.*]

FYOKLA

Yes, go bring him back! That's how much you know about the marriage business! If he had at least run out through the door—there might be some hope. But when the bridegroom jumps through a window—well, excuse me! That's what!

END

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